

TRAVELLER

DEEP NIGHT REVELATION
VOIDSHORE



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER

DEEP NIGHT REVELATION VOIDSHORE

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	02
REFEREE'S INFORMATION	03
THE SOLOMANI EXPEDITION	04
THE BIOLOGICALS	06
THE DROYNE AT DRAYTSIRV	08
THE VOIDSHORE REGION	10
BEYOND THE FAR SIDE OF NOWHERE	13
THE GREAT BIOSHIP	16
A PLACE OF DEATH	21
CRADLE OF THE BIOLOGICALS	23
DRAYTSIRV	30
BIOLOGY EXPERIMENT	40
PICTURES OF HOME	53
STANDING ON THE EDGE	58
TO TERMINUS POINT	69
HIGHGUARD: SPACECRAFT AND VEHICLES	71
HIGHGUARD: GIANT BIOLOGICALS	86
APPENDIX: ALLIES AND OPPONENTS	93

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T R A V E L L E R INTRODUCTION

Voidshore is the fifth expansion for the *Deepnight Revelation* campaign. It details a region of space known as Voidshore to the expedition's planners, which lies between the edge of the spiral arm and Point FSN-X. The Voidshore region is bounded on the spinward side by the Great Rift and open on the trailing side.

This sourcebook assumes the Travellers have generally followed the planned path of the *Deepnight Revelation* expedition and arrived on the fringes of Voidshore by way of the Far Side of Nowhere. If this is not the case, perhaps because the Travellers detoured around the Great Rift rather than crossing it, the Voidshore region can be transplanted to a suitable location. It will still be necessary to find a route into the mouth of the Great Rift and thereby to Terminus Point, so most features of the region will be the same. However, the presence of the Solomani expedition on the far side of the Great Rift might require some explanation. Perhaps a very bad misjump resulted from an experimental synchronised jump operation.

The distance from Point FSN-X to the edge of the spiral arm is around 150 parsecs; it is around 130 parsecs to the edge of the Great Rift. Point VS-X, an arbitrary navigational marker, is around 190 parsecs from Point FSN-X and lies around 20 parsecs from the edge of the Great Rift. When they reach Point FSN-X, the Travellers only have a couple of hundred parsecs to go. At any other time that might seem like a lot but after the voyage so far they may feel like runners in sight of the tape. However, there are still some obstacles to overcome.

The Travellers learned of the existence of the Biologicals in the previous adventure. They may prefer to avoid contact with them and push on with their mission but the existence of such alien creatures poses a number of questions. Are they a threat to Charted Space? Or to the people of the Far Side of Nowhere? Are they connected with the Deepnight Entity somehow? The Travellers may want answers to these questions or feel they need to pursue them whether they want to or not. They may also have no choice but to confront the Biologicals.

The second major problem is the presence of Solomani ships in the Voidshore. This is an expedition from the Solomani Rim and is less of a threat to the Travellers than it might at first seem. Indeed, the Solomani are in grave danger and may need assistance, and there is always the possibility they might unwittingly take the Deepnight Entity with them when they return home. The Travellers may find themselves considering the destruction of the Solomani ships out of a desire to protect the Solomani people – and everyone else in Charted Space.

The Travellers' goal in *Voidshore* is to get to the mouth of the Great Rift and begin looking for a way to cross to Terminus Point. Once they achieve that their epic voyage is almost over – all they have to do now is locate, confront and destroy the Deepnight Entity...

T R A V E L L E R REFEREE'S INFORMATION

There are two 'mysteries' for the Travellers to investigate in *Voidshore*. The first, the origins and nature of the Biologicals, they already know about. The second may come as a complete surprise to them. These two adventures will take place near the beginning and close to the end of the Travellers' voyage across the Voidshore region. In the meantime there are many opportunities for the same sort of adventures and side trips the Travellers have undertaken all the way from Charted Space.

Some information on the Biologicals was presented in *The Far Side of Nowhere* but the Travellers will discover that what they know is very much incomplete. Visits to Draytsirv and the Biologicals' homeworld will give a much clearer picture of how dangerous and how *different* these creatures are. Infestation of the Biologicals by the Deepnight Entity is difficult but the combination of their capabilities might be unstoppable. An infected bioship would be able to transport the infestation between star systems in a matter of weeks and a multi-braincase enclave might develop a smarter entity at an early stage, perhaps becoming capable of planning a campaign of infestation.

At the other end of the Voidshore adventure comes an encounter with people from Charted Space. They are from the Solomani Confederation, at times part of the Imperium and at times an enemy, but more importantly they are humans with whom the Travellers share a great deal of common culture. This encounter might become just another difficulty to be overcome but has the potential to be a reminder of what the Travellers came all this way to protect. If the Travellers succeed in destroying the Deepnight Entity, the Solomani Confederation and the Imperium get to carry on their political rivalry and military posturing, which may seem comfortingly petty in the face of annihilation.

Alternatively, the Solomani presence might be seen as a threat by the Travellers. They know little about the entity, but what if they decided to harness it as a weapon against their enemies? The members of the Solomani expedition may have similar fears about the Travellers. Whether the Solomani expedition is perceived as unlikely friends or sinister foes depends very much on the Referee's own interpretation of Solomani/Imperial relations – and of course on how the Travellers react to meeting people from 'back home, more or less' in the Voidshore.

The exact equipment carried by the Solomani expedition has been left a little loose. This is partly because this level of detail is not really necessary and partly to permit the Referee to tailor it to the needs of the campaign. If the Travellers obtain equipment from the Solomani by any means – trade, cooperation or looting bodies – the Referee can decide exactly what is gained. This allows the Referee to plug any gaps in the Travellers' capabilities or create opportunities for additional minor adventures. It may be that Solomani equipment is completely compatible with the Travellers' systems... or not. The Travellers may have to make do with useful but not perfect gear and creatively overcome the interoperability issues, or find a way to modify their new gear.

How much of a story this generates is, as always, up to the Referee's judgement and the Travellers' initiative. It is recommended that the Referee should allow the Travellers to begin the final adventure well equipped – it is hard enough without them missing some vital piece of kit! However, cooperation or peaceful trade should be rewarded more than violence. If the Travellers roleplay their way to a good deal that benefits everyone, they should gain more than if they simply shoot the Solomani and take their stuff. In the latter case, the Referee might present the Solomani as desperate, at the end of their resources after multiple system breakdowns. The Travellers might or might not feel bad about murdering a bunch of helpless space-hoboes but they should not benefit much from their actions.

The Referee should also keep in mind that the Travellers do not need to visit point VS-X. It is merely a navigational landmark; their true goal is the edge of the Great Rift where they can begin searching for a crossing to Terminus Point. It may be necessary to spend a considerable amount of time looking for a suitable location but experience gained in crossing the Great Rift should stand the Travellers in good stead. Eventually the Travellers will reach a point within striking distance of the location referred to as Crossing Alpha in the *Terminus Point* adventure. From there, they can begin the final adventure of the campaign and confront the Deepnight Entity in its lair.

THE BIOLOGICALS

The Biologicals are the result of a highly unusual uplift project carried out by the Ancients expedition which passed through this region of space some 300,000 years ago. They discovered an unusual ecosystem and took some time to study it. Oyskrusk and his crew were fascinated by the way the dominant species straddled the boundary of plant and animal, whilst also concerned about what might happen if this species was absorbed by the Deepnight Entity. They spent several years studying then modifying what are now known as the Biologicals.

Oyskrusk and his crew were weary by this point in their voyage, depleted by casualties throughout the crew and bereft of their primary scientists. Their judgement may have been rather poor and their science was definitely wayward. It is likely that, for many, the sojourn on the Biologicals' homeworld was a welcome rest rather than a necessary project. Ultimately the expedition moved on, leaving behind a changing world. It would be tens of thousands of years before the modifications took full effect but eventually the Biologicals would emerge onto the interstellar stage as a starfaring, but not necessarily sentient, species.

At the heart of the Biologicals' success was the semi-independent braincase. This was originally the core of a large plant complex, tens of metres in diameter. Oyskrusk and his crew implanted genetic code for larger and more capable braincases and in the meantime conducted a number of experiments. Some of these bordered upon the weird; could a braincase be fitted to an artificial body and made ambulatory as a servitor? Could a group be linked together as organic computing devices? Most of these experiments were failures or resulted in capabilities far lower than those of existing technologies, although the expedition's scientists learned much.

Long after the Droyne expedition met its end in the Terminus Point star system, changes began to appear in the vegetation of the Biologicals' homeworld. Plant fibres that could move almost as quickly as animal muscle allowed creepers to grab objects and even use them as primitive tools. It was millennia before the first ambulator body dragged itself out of the ground but once the Biologicals were mobile their capabilities expanded enormously.

The species, if that is the right word, began to cooperate without any of the usual hallmarks of sentience. There was no 'hive mind' as such; it was more that every braincase had the same instinctive directives and would work towards the same goal. That goal was the same as every other species – survive and spread. Where multiple braincases were in an area, they would fall into specific roles. One will control a central 'grow-vine', producing new braincases and bodies. It might move on in one of those bodies, leaving a different braincase behind, or remain as the centre of the local group. Others use ambulators to colonise new areas or carry out tasks necessary to the local group.

All braincases 'know' everything a braincase they have been in contact with has experienced. It is not clear how long information interchange takes but small pieces of information are transmitted in a matter of instants. More technical knowledge is 'known' but not consciously understood. Thus braincases 'know' how to grow a jump-capable starship body just as they know how to make root cells or all the necessary parts of an ambulator body. A braincase is not aware it knows this – arguably it is not aware of anything but simply reacts according to its nature. However, just as an ambulator body will be grown when the need is perceived, so a starship will be grown if the right stimuli are encountered. The Biologicals can be thought of as much like moss; they spread and grow as colonies, reacting to conditions around them without conscious thought.

THE BIOSHIPS

Growing a body capable of withstanding space travel is a long process, probably taking thousands of years. The Biologicals 'know' how to do this due to the Droyne data-storage experiment. They used a multiplexed network of braincases to store data and to find out how much could be stored they used their own databases. When the braincase multiplex was left behind, what it knew was transferred into all other braincases it came into contact with. None of this information is understood in a conscious way but just as the Biologicals know there are other places they can get to with an ambulator, there are also very distant places they can get to with what humans have termed a 'bioship'. It is debatable whether these are starships in the usual sense; they might be better thought of as huge ambulator bodies



with a biological jump drive at their heart. However, it is difficult for humans to conceive of a multi-thousand-ton jump-capable object as anything other than a starship.

Each bioship is different, although there are common traits among them. Typically they are shaped rather like an egg, with the biological equivalent of a manoeuvre drive at the wide end. The outer skin is generally uneven, with clumps of foliage here and there. Some of these include pods that can spit spiny projectiles – acting as a close-in anti-personnel defence system – or quick-moving vines that can lash or grab a target. When a bioship touches down on a suitable planet, some of this foliage begins to act as roots, growing down into the local soil. Initially this is to anchor the bioship and to take food but one that remains in place long enough can establish a local colony of biologicals by depositing a braincase and sufficient plant material to support it.

ENCLAVES OF BIOLOGICALS

Enclaves of Biologicals can be found on multiple worlds. Typically they are restricted to a geographical location with natural boundaries but eventually can overcome obstacles. However, if the Biologicals do not know there is habitable land beyond a desert or mountain range they will not attempt a crossing; they may not do so even if a braincase is transported there and brought back.

They do not *want* as such; they spread because they can and move because they need to. Deliberate expeditions across an inhospitable region are as rare as bioships; they occur because some stimulus has occurred rather than due to an imperative to control wider areas.

Where it is possible to spread, the Biologicals will do so. The pattern is always the same; they occupy the most fertile land and spread out along paths of least resistance. A local ecosystem will be taken over in clumps rather than evenly and completely and areas with thin soil or too little water will generally be ignored. Whilst the Biologicals have no need for metals and minerals in the sense of human civilisation, they do need nutrients and trace elements from soil.

Psionics, of a mind-to-mind sort, do not work on Biologicals although physical effects such as telekinesis will function as normal. It might be possible to establish some sort of mental contact eventually but this would take many years of study and effort. Likewise, most mental detection methods – psionic and artificial – will overlook a braincase or see it as a fuzzy and slight increase above background noise rather than an obvious intellect. Thus it is possible to overlook an enclave and wander right into it, so searching for braincases with neural activity detectors requires educated guesswork and getting very close before the braincase will stand out enough to be located.

C H A P T E R - T W O

THE DROYNE AT DRAYTSIRV

The Dual Alliance (of humans and Droyne) is based in the Far Side of Nowhere. Its homeworld, Grand Skies, was officially declared to have been unified in -210. As with all such formal declarations, the reality was a little different. Large-scale opposition to the alliance ended but several groups never really accepted the 'perfect and mutually beneficial harmony of humans and Droyne' that the Dual Alliance represented. Semi-autonomous regions were tolerated so long as they did not cause trouble but around the year 350 one of these regions rose up in armed rebellion against the alliance as a whole. The cause was lost before the fighting began but still the rebels put up a gallant fight.

Rather than crush the rebel faction, and perhaps see a resurgence or flare-up somewhere else in a few years, the Dual Alliance made an offer to the surviving rebels and all others with a similar mindset. Despite a certain amount of mistrust the rebels, who had objected to living closely with humans and feared losing their traditional culture, were granted assistance to relocate to a suitable new homeworld. This escalated, until eventually several thousand Droyne made a much longer voyage than originally envisaged and settled on a world they named Draytsirv.

Draytsirv lay on the far side of the Transition Zone and retained only intermittent contact with the Dual Alliance. After a few support missions this dried up entirely, leaving Draytsirv as an isolated outpost. The population gradually expanded and a small industrial base became established. Eventually the Droyne of Draytsirv began to build their own spacecraft and, finally, starships. This was their undoing.

Draytsirv had been home to a few enclaves of Biologicals' for tens of thousands of years but the world was not to their liking. The balance of trace elements in the soil was such that the Biologicals could survive there but not thrive. They were mostly restricted to areas with soil composition more to their liking, which happened to be far from the large island chain chosen as the site of the initial Draytsirv colony. Encounters were rare and inconsequential. The Biologicals were not interested in anything not immediately a threat or of use and the Droyne were only looking to build their own technological society in a small area. The rest of the planet was of little account.

Eventually the colony on Draytsirv built jump-capable starships and one of them landed on the Biologicals' homeworld. This was a different situation altogether. Perceiving a threat, the Biologicals wiped out the crew of the Droyne ship and, over many years, explored its interior. Eventually they came to realise, in their own way at least, that this was an interstellar vessel like their own bioships. The capabilities of the Droyne ship were eventually comprehended and, at some point, an enterprising bioship began to absorb its jump drive. Years later, the bioship made an interstellar jump without having to wait days for its drives to charge.

The Biologicals now knew about technological drive systems. They did not know where they came from, however, until one of their vessels made a random visit to Draytsirv. There, it learned from the local enclave that there were fleshy creatures on the planet who resembled those who had come to the Biologicals' homeworld in the incredible fast-jumping conveyance. A distant, vague memory told of previous encounters with such creatures millennia ago but what was important in the present was that there was a thing the Biologicals wanted and they knew where to get it. Conflict was inevitable from that point.

The Biologicals proceeded in a rather haphazard manner – as they are wont to do – but eventually established enclaves within the island chain occupied by the Droyne of Draytsirv. These were initially ignored by the Droyne, but when they became a nuisance measures were taken to remove them. The Biologicals were driven from the islands but established themselves on nearby land masses. Eventually they grew sea-going ambulators and launched what can only be described as an invasion.

So it was for many years, with the Biologicals repeatedly driven from the islands but always returning. They would become established and grow ambulators in remote parts of the islands, or make areas untenable for the Droyne, only to be wiped out by a costly counter-offensive. An attempt to create an agent to kill the Biologicals failed, ironically due to the resilience to the Deepnight Entity the ancient Droyne had bred into them. The Droyne lost a city, then another and finally were trapped in a small part of one settlement.



Salvation of a sort came when a Droyne researcher noticed the Biologicals had an apparent fascination for technological devices. With plenty of wreckage to work from, the Droyne began to put together devices and leave them as offerings. Eventually they tried it with part of a starship and, to their astonishment, the attacks ceased for a time. Once they resumed, the Droyne narrowed the offerings down and eventually realised the Biologicals wanted jump drives. So long as they provided a working drive every few years the Biologicals left them alone.

The Droyne were able to reclaim one of their cities and rebuilt their population back to a few tens of thousands. For their part the Biologicals experimented with the drives, usually without success. Sometimes a bioship would blow itself up, or come apart under the stress of making a jump. Some were able to make a few jumps before the drive malfunctioned or the bioship made a mistake. Only a few managed to establish reliable jump capability with the Droyne-built drives and these broke down quickly due to lack of proper maintenance.

This precarious balance of propitiation with jump drives and occasional other technology was established around 800 and went on for more than 200 years. During this time the Droyne never learned to communicate meaningfully with the Biologicals but the Biologicals

learned a great deal about the wider universe. The arrival of a ship out of the Dual Alliance upset the balance and led directly to the extermination of the Droyne colony.

As soon as the ship arrived, the Biologicals wanted it. The locals tried to convince the crew to hand over their vessel and make the best life they could on Draytsirv but the newcomers would have none of it. They tried to inspire the locals to rise up and throw off the yoke of their oppressors but succeeded only in triggering a half-hearted rebellion by unprepared people. This was easily crushed and the Biologicals then began wiping out the Droyne. Despite a spirited resistance the Droyne never really stood a chance. The newcomer crew decided to take a warning of the threat to the Dual Alliance and took off with samples of Biologicals bodies and tissues in the biosphere modules of their ship.

This well-meaning effort came to an end in a nearby system. The Droyne had thought their samples well contained but they were wrong. Ambulators rampaged through their vessel as a nearby bioship began to close in. After a brief and ineffectual resistance they crash-landed on a water world in the system designated PPBO Beta Primary 2. This occurred some 20 years ago, coinciding more or less with the destruction of Droyne civilisation on Draytsirv. The wreck was plundered by the bioship, which left a couple of braincases to create an enclave around the remains.

THE VOIDSHORE REGION

The Voidshore region lies to rimward of the Far Side of Nowhere, separated from it by what the *Deepnight* expedition's planners called the Transition Zone. This is a region of low stellar density that creates an obstacle to navigation by starships from the Far Side of Nowhere. A jump-4 vessel such as *Deepnight Revelation* will have little trouble crossing the Transition Zone but other than the occasional very long range mission out of the FSN region, the Voidshore is not known to have been explored by humans.

It is possible that the Travellers might encounter humans or Droyne in the Voidshore. If so, these are likely to be 'barbarian' populations descended from a misjumped colony ship. This does not preclude the possibility of a starfaring culture if the Referee wants to add one but it will be isolated and probably unaware of the politics in the Far Side of Nowhere.

The Biologicals have enclaves on a few worlds but are not widespread. Their ships take thousands of years to grow and are very few in number other than around their homeworld, so the Travellers might encounter a bioship or two in their entire voyage across the Voidshore. Only if they seek the Biologicals' home system will they meet multiple bioships.

The map presented here connects to the Far Side of Nowhere but can be manipulated to suit the Referee's needs. A given sector can be omitted, replaced or moved if necessary – it is better to play fast and loose with the map than railroad the Travellers into being in the 'right' place. Such liberties could not be taken in a well-established region like Charted Space but since the Travellers are on a voyage of exploration what they discover will become the reality of *their Traveller* universe. If the Referee later wants to undertake further modifications or rejig his own *Traveller* universe to fit with the 'official' one, this can usually be done without anyone noticing.

The huge distances involved tend to create disconnects for the Travellers and a little fiddling with the map can be attributed to inaccuracies or errors. The local area has to remain consistent whilst the Travellers are in it but their experience of the voyage will be of small bubbles of space they have explored and experienced, connected by a vague dotted line of refuellings and uninteresting

star systems. The bubbles should remain consistent but how they relate to one another can usually be changed without doing violence to the setting.

MAP OF THE VOIDSHORE

The Voidshore region contains three distinct sub-regions: the Transition Zone, the Rift's Edge and the rest of the Voidshore. Sector designations in brackets are largely or wholly rift. Those in **bold** are in the Far Side of Nowhere, whilst those in *italics* form part of the Transition Zone and those underlined are in the Rift's Edge. Sector designations are intended to indicate location and stellar density. They are temporary and may be replaced by more creative names assigned by the Travellers.

The Transition Zone is a belt, on average three subsectors wide but up to six in places, of low stellar density. It starts two sectors in from the Great Rift to spinward and extends significantly to trailingward until it terminates at a dense cluster of star systems. The existence of the Transition Zone has been a barrier to exploration from the Far Side of Nowhere and was a factor in the decision by the Solomani expedition to take a rimward route rather than proceeding more directly towards Terminus Point. The Transition Zone is not as great an obstacle as the Solomani mission planners had expected but does create a natural frontier in the same way a desert could be crossed but an easier route would normally be chosen.

The Rift's Edge consists of three sectors on the edge of the Great Rift, within which stellar density falls rapidly towards the spinward end of the sector. There are few stars other than in the trailingwardmost subsectors. Somewhere in this region the Travellers must find a way to cross to Terminus Point.

The Voidshore sectors have normal stellar density, with some clumps and sparse areas. The rimward sectors mostly exhibit lower system density than elsewhere, with the transition from spiral arm to inter-arm taking place quite abruptly across the span of two subsectors. There are exceptions to this pattern, notably the cluster of stars extending out to rimward beyond the 'shore' like a spit of land sticking out into the sea.

	(RIFT)	LETHE	HUBUR	CELADON	NARAKA	MALVAM FSN-X	ELIVAGAR					
RIFTSEDGE COREWARD		RIFTSEDGE BRIDGE	FSD TRANSITION SPINWARD	LSD TRANSITION ONE	ZSD TRANSITION TWO	LSD TRANSITION THREE	LSD TRANSITION FOUR	LSD TRANSITION TRAILING	BIG ISLAND			
RIFTSEDGE CENTRAL		VOIDSHORE ONE	VOIDSHORE TWO	VOIDSHORE THREE	LSD TRANSITION RIMWARD	VOIDSHORE FOUR	VOIDSHORE FIVE	VOIDSHORE SIX	VOIDSHORE TRAILING			
RIFTSEDGE RIMWARD		VS-X	VOIDSHORE SEVEN	ORION'S SPIT COREWARD	VOIDSHORE EIGHT	VOIDSHORE NINE	VOIDSHORE TEN	VOIDSHORE ELEVEN	VOIDSHORE RIMWARD	(RIFT)	(RIFT)	(RIFT)
(RIFT)	(RIFT)		(RIFT)	ORION'S SPIT RIMWARD	(RIFT)	(RIFT)	(RIFT)	(RIFT)				

Riftsedge Coreward sector is the corewardmost of the three Rift's Edge sectors. The spinward side of the sector is open rift, with stellar density increasing unevenly towards the trailing edge. The central subsectors display greater system density than the coreward and rimward ones.

Riftsedge Bridge is a region of normal stellar density, creating a 'bridge' around the end of the Transition Zone.

FSD Transition Spinward is a region of falling stellar density, as the FSD designation indicates. The spinward subsectors display normal stellar distribution (a star system is present in a hex on 1–3 on 1D), falling to very low (1 on 1D) at the trailing side.

LSD Transition One is the first of the Transition Zone sectors. Stellar density is very low, with a fairly even distribution across the sector.

ZSD Transition Two has near-zero stellar density (hence the ZSD designation) across most of its area and has been referred to at times as the 'Black Pit' by gloomier crewmembers. The exception is a clump of four star systems almost directly in the centre of the sector.

LSD Transition Three has similarly low system density to Transition One but distribution is less even. Most systems are on the trailingward side of the sector, creating a rift sometimes referred to as the Black Pit Annex.

LSD Transition Four has very low stellar density on its spinward side, rising to low (1–2 on 1D) in the trailingward subsectors.

LSD Transition Trailing is the last of the main Transition Zone sectors, displaying low stellar density throughout. It is less of an obstacle than the sectors to spinward.

Big Island sector is named for a huge cluster of stars near its centre, forming a very definite end to the Transition Zone. Stellar density is normal in the rest of the sector.

Riftsedge Central sector is mostly open rift, with a narrow fringe of stars along the trailingward edge of the sector. The rimward-trailing corner of the sector displays low to average stellar density, dropping to almost zero in the rest of the sector.

LSD Transition Rimward sector is considered to be part of the Transition Zone. Stellar density is very low in most of the sector, rising to low towards the rimward end.

Voidshore One to **Voidshore Eleven** sectors display very low to normal stellar density, creating a patchwork of clusters, mains and small rifts. When generating a sector, the Referee should roll 1D for each subsector. On a 1–2 the subsector has Very Low (1 on 1D) stellar density. On 3–4 density is low (1–2 on 1D) and on 5–6 density is normal (1–3 on 1D).

Voidshore Trailing sector marks the boundary of the region designated as The Voidshore. It has normal stellar density.

Riftsedge Rimward sector offers the best prospect for a route across to Terminus Point. Most of the sector is characterised by average to low stellar density, with the spinward-coreward and spinward-rimward corners being mostly empty. A few outlier systems exist, possibly creating a chain allowing a high-jump ship to cross into the next sector spinward.

VS-X sector is named for Point VS-X, which is located within it. Stellar density is average, falling off to spinward and rimward.

Orion's Spit Coreward is a region of average overall stellar density, with star systems mostly concentrated in a 'spit' some 12–16 parsecs wide extending rimwards into the next sector. The remainder of the sector has quite low stellar density, creating the impression of a headland jutting out into the sea.

Voidshore Rimward marks the trailingward end of the Voidshore region. Like other sectors on the edge of the spiral arm, stellar density falls towards the rimward end of the sector.

Orion's Spit Rimward contains the rimward half of Orion's Spit, projecting out into inter-arm space for two subsectors, with width gradually diminishing from 12 parsecs to 6. The spit stops abruptly at what is currently known as Orion's Headland, with a small cluster of stars forming an 'island' further out. The rest of the sector is open rift.

BEYOND THE FAR SIDE OF NOWHERE

The Travellers could exit the FSN region almost anywhere along its rimward boundary. They may choose to head for Point VS-X, but there is actually no requirement to do so. They are seeking a route across the mouth of the Great Rift to Terminus Point, whereas Point VS-X is merely a navigational reference. However, it is natural to head for landmarks, so more than likely the Travellers will pursue a roughly spinward-rimward course in the general direction of Terminus Point.

There are still many adventures to be had before the Travellers reach their goal and time for plenty of side trips to investigate points of interest or restock. Indeed, if the Travellers are wise they will schedule a rest, repair and resupply stopover somewhere in the Voidshore region in preparation for their final transit to Terminus Point. There is no way to know what difficulties they will face there and what resources might or might not be available.

The people of the Far Side of Nowhere have launched a few exploration missions into the Voidshore but other than a deliberate relocation from the Dual Alliance there has been little attempt at colonisation, so the Travellers are unlikely to encounter humans or Droyne in this region other than at Draytsirv. This does not rule out the possibility of encounters with other intelligent species, which may or may not possess the technology necessary for star flight. It is entirely possible that a starfaring culture arose and collapsed in the distant past, leaving behind only relics for the Travellers to find. The Travellers might also encounter races just setting out on that journey, bravely venturing out into space in rickety ships like those of the Terrans in the 20th and early 21st Centuries on Earth.

The Voidshore is a large region, with the possibility of encountering great wonders. However, by this point the expedition is heading for its final goal and the campaign is building up to a climax. If the Travellers want to forge ahead the Referee should not throw too many obstacles in the way. If they decide they need to obtain materials and supplies, this may lead to additional adventures but the Referee should not make this too hard or time-consuming.

The encounter with the Solomani expedition may offer a last chance to obtain replacement personnel or equipment, or to ensure that someone back home learns about the mission's findings. That means trusting members of a potentially hostile state but there are benefits for both sides in such an exchange. How this encounter plays out is, as always, dependent upon the actions of the Travellers.

If the Referee feels that a rapid move towards the finale is necessary, the Solomani expedition can be encountered soon after leaving Zeta 2 and Draytsirv. In this case, the Solomani can be assumed to have found a potential jumping-off point within reach of Crossing Alpha. If the Travellers can obtain this information from the Solomani, they might decide to head straight for the crossing point.

POINT VS-X

The Travellers can wander around the Voidshore region for years if they want to, having all manner of adventures along the way. As already noted there is no real need to go to Point VS-X but the Travellers may find the region interesting enough to make a side trip. Data on this system is presented here in the event they do.

Point VS-X is defined by four distinctive stars. The first is the rapid pulsar RFA-VS-Q. This object lies outside the Voidshore region and beyond the conventionally accepted bounds of the spiral arm, more or less directly to rimward of Point VS-X. It is easily detectable from Charted Space and provides a quick initial positional reference to any ship in the Voidshore. This is one of the first reference points the Travellers would expect to register after a jump in the region. Depending on the ending of the Terminus Point adventure, the fact that *Deepnight Revelation* cannot detect RFA-VS-Q may be an early indication that something is awry.

RFA-VS-Q provides a distant general reference point that can be used to find the stars of the VS-X system. These do not produce powerful radio-frequency emissions but are certainly interesting. The system centres on a near-identical pair of very hot blue giant stars, which orbit

one another and have a close companion in the form of an O9 (blue) main sequence star. This inner system zone contains just one planet, a large gas giant in an eccentric orbit. It is subject to enormous stresses and heating, and is only borderline stable.

This inner grouping of giant stars is orbited by three more stellar groups and five solo stellar objects. VS-X Secondary is a hot blue-white main sequence star with an M5 (red) close companion. There is nothing larger than a planetoid orbiting this pairing. The Tertiary stellar group consists of a K5 (orange) main sequence star and its M3 close companion. These have a small planetary system consisting of a small gas giant, a sparse planetoid field and a single terrestrial planet of no great value.

Minor A is a typical brown dwarf with no planets or moons, whilst Minor B is a red main sequence star with a small planetary system. Its inner gas giant has a barely stable orbit, which is highly elliptical and inclined at 80° to the ecliptic. The Minor C system contains a dry but tolerable world and a second terrestrial with an unbreatheable very thin atmosphere and a little water. Primitive life has begun to develop on this world. The Minor D and Minor E systems contain only gas giants. The VS-X system also contains a pair of red main sequence stars in a very distant orbit, with a brown dwarf orbiting them as a distant companion. This grouping contains no planets but may have the usual assortment of comets and planetoids.

VS-X PRIMARY A (O3 Giant Star)

VS-X PRIMARY B (O4 Giant Star)

VS-X PRIMARY COMPANION (O9 Main Sequence Star)

VS-X Primary 1 (Large Gas Giant)

VS-X SECONDARY (A8 Main Sequence Star)

VS-X SECONDARY COMPANION (M5 Main Sequence Star)

VS-X TERTIARY A (K5 Star)

VS-X TERTIARY B (M3 Star)

Tertiary 1 (X000000-0)

Tertiary 2 (X421000-0)

Tertiary 3 (Small Gas Giant)

VS-X MINOR A (Brown Dwarf)

VS-X MINOR B (M6 Star)

Minor B 1 (Small Gas Giant)

Minor B 2 (X7BA000-0)

Minor B 3 (Large Gas Giant)

Minor B 4 (X000000-0)

Minor B 5 (X710000-0)

VS-X MINOR C (K5 Star)

Minor C 1 (Small Gas Giant)

Minor C 2 (X731000-0)

Minor C 3 (X653000-0)

Minor C 4 (Small Gas Giant)

Minor C 5 (Small Gas Giant)

VS-X MINOR D (K4 Star)

Minor D 1 (Large Gas Giant)

VS-X MINOR E (Brown Dwarf)

Minor E 1 (Small Gas Giant)

Minor E 2 (Small Gas Giant)

VS-X DISTANT PRIMARY (M5 star)

VS-X DISTANT SECONDARY (M6 Star)

VS-X DISTANT COMPANION (Brown Dwarf)

Minor C 3

Minor C 3 is the only habitable planet in the system. As might be expected conditions are harsh and life rather primitive. The shallow, salty seas are filled with plankton and similar simple creatures, which are fed on by a few higher species. There is virtually no animal life on land and most plants are succulents clinging to a precarious existence along the edges of the vast deserts. Surface temperature varies depending on the relative positions of the other stars in the system. At present the world is going through a hot period, as its star approaches closer to the two giants at the centre of the system.

The hot/cool cycle is tens of thousands of years long, resulting in repeated periods of evolution in one direction then another. This is sufficient to make the planet worthy of an extensive study by life and planetary scientists but not an exciting one. C 3 is a place where small nuggets of knowledge are gained from long periods of study and since the Travellers have a mission to complete they cannot really spare the time to undertake such a deep study.

There is, however, a find to make at VS-X. Such a distinctive system was bound to attract the attention of Oyskrusk and his crew. They landed here, spending many months resting and preparing for the final advance to Terminus Point. Naturally, they built a monument recording their achievements and adventures. It is obvious on an orbital scan, despite it being rather less ostentatious than other works built by Oyskrusk. The monument site will show up as an obvious anomaly; regular shapes made from a metallic alloy with a different temperature signature to the surrounding terrain.

The monument stands at the centre of a perfectly flat circle fused into the surface of the planet's biggest desert. The circle goes down 25 metres and is over a kilometre in diameter, with a 20 metres needle at its exact centre. This is surrounded by six partially hollow hemispheres. The inward-facing surface of each is slightly concave and five are covered in the same whirls and spiral patterns as other monuments. Each of these triggers a different response in any sensitives who view them.

- Monument 1 triggers 'memories' of the beginning of Oyskrusk's voyage; how his crew boarded their ship with great purpose and set off for the far end of the Great Rift. They knew their mission was necessary and correct, so were confident others would follow them and assist.
- Monument 2 triggers 'memories' of the mistake made by the scientist Tyovask and work undertaken by the crew of Oyskrusk's ship Tresskvuess to contain and undo their error.
- Monument 3 triggers 'memories' of the crossing of the Great Rift. The Droyne were afraid of the Leviathans they encountered, a primal fear for which there is no explanation in the carvings. Nevertheless, they studied them before landing on the frozen star and building a monument to their voyage.
- Monument 4 triggers 'memories' of the long stay on Zeta 2 and the efforts to create a form of plant matter than was fully resistant – and inimical – to the Deepnight Entity.
- Monument 5 triggers 'memories' of the voyage into the Voidshore region, exploration of the wonders of this complex star system and the construction of this record of the voyage. There is also a feeling of intense loneliness, as if Oyskrusk and his crew knew their civilisation had fallen in their absence and a resolve to complete the mission alone if necessary.
- Monument 6 is completely, and poignantly, blank.

It is not clear whether the Droyne intended to return to this place and make a final recording of their triumph, or whether the blank monument signifies an open future full of possibilities. Either way, it is almost certain they did not return from Terminus Point.



THE GREAT BIOSHIP

In *The Far Side of Nowhere* the Travellers encountered a powerful battlecruiser that had been smashed by another vessel of enormous destructive capability. Its jump drive was missing. At the time there was no explanation available, although the Travellers might have inferred that the Biologicals were involved somehow. This conclusion is correct. The battlecruiser was attacked by what could be described as 'the Great Bioship', one of the oldest and most experienced of the bioships. It is still, ultimately, a plant intelligence but is tens of thousands of years old and capable of rudimentary learning. The Great Bioship has scavenged technological components from a number of vessels and outposts over recent decades and has now obtained a working jump drive.

If the Great Bioship manages to retain the jump drive and return it to an enclave there will be no immediate consequences. It will grow around the drive and experiment with it and in perhaps 50 years or so might make its first jump. Knowledge gained from the drive might be passed on to other bioships, perhaps improving their performance, but the most serious consequence of this new capability will be the creation of a desire to duplicate it. Biologicals are capable of only the most basic abstract thought and cannot extrapolate possibilities with any degree of imagination. However, once a capability is recognised the inference is obvious – by integrating technological jump drives the bioships will be able to travel further and faster, spreading the Biologicals as a species over a much larger area. This is desirable on an instinctive level, so an imperative to obtain more jump drives will be created.

The only known source of these technological jump drives is on the far side of the Transition Zone, in the Far Side of Nowhere. This will become what might be termed a whole-species goal and sooner or later the Far Side of Nowhere will be invaded by a large force of bioships. The time frame is probably around 150-200 years from the present but whilst slow the offensive will be inexorable. The human and Droyne cultures of FSN will face an implacable foe whose motives are at first unclear. Once the Biologicals arrive they will settle every habitable world they encounter, creating a struggle for dominance that will likely end only in the extinction of one side or the other.

The Travellers are unlikely to be able to figure this out for themselves, so the Referee should present an analysis at some point. This will be created by the 'what-if merchants' of the Mission Division and is part of the reward for success – knowing that they prevented this turn of events will add to whatever triumph the Travellers feel they have achieved. Given the epic scope of their voyage, it seems only right that the Travellers should be made aware of how they have changed history.

Having seized a large jump drive in working order, the Great Bioship is meandering in the direction of the Biologicals' homeworld in no great hurry. It is moving rather aimlessly at present, basking in the warmth of each sun it jumps to for a few days at least before moving on. It has backtracked at times and may decide to land on a habitable planet to feed. In short, the Travellers can encounter the Great Bioship almost anywhere. When they do, it will attack them.

UNPROVOKED AGGRESSION

The Great Bioship perceives *Deepnight Revelation* as a threat and also a possible source of another large jump drive. This is an instinctive reaction and cannot be changed. From the moment it perceives the Travellers' vessel the Great Bioship will begin closing in. This can take place in any star system of the Referee's choosing.

The Travellers will become aware of a large object, perhaps 100,000 tons or more, moving under low power. Initial sensor readings are vague and confusing, suggesting the object is of more or less uniform density, lower than a metal ship would be, except for a single area of high metallic content. The object is under power, changing course to intercept *Deepnight Revelation* at a stately 0.35g acceleration. The Travellers might assume this is a Leviathan, although the density is too low and energy emissions are entirely different. Indeed, whereas Leviathan positively sparkle with energy this object has very low emissions other than some gravity waves from its drive.

As the object approaches, or a probe is sent to intercept it, more details emerge. The object is more or less egg-shaped, with clumps of what appear to be foliage

growing from it. One side of the pointed end is flattened, as if by some enormous impact. In fact this is exactly what happened; the Great Bioship broke the back of a Grand Republic battlecruiser by ramming it at speed. Various projections can be seen all across the hull, most of which appear to be thick root-like growths.

A closer scan of the metallic sensor return suggests it is a highly complex device embedded at a rather odd angle in the hull of the bioship. It might at first be mistaken for debris jammed into the surface of the hull after a collision but as sensors match reference points it becomes apparent that this is a jump drive from a very large ship. This knowledge may serve as a warning to the Travellers, allowing them to prepare for a possible attack. If they do not make the connection between a shattered battlecruiser with a missing jump drive and a large spacegoing creature or object with obvious impact damage and a jump drive embedded in its outer surface, someone less obtuse will point it out. What is not clear at this point is exactly how the drive unit came to be there.

The Great Bioship approaches, almost lazily, on an intercept course that will position it a few kilometres from *Deepnight Revelation*. It does not respond to any form of communication. The Travellers will have an opportunity to get a good look at the bioship and discuss what its composition implies, before a large object suddenly detaches itself from the vessel. Initially this may seem like a small craft launch but the object begins to accelerate rapidly – under at least 6g acceleration – on a direct intercept course. The tactical monitoring system (correctly) identifies this as a missile launch.

The projectile is a spreader lance, a variant of the largest missiles used by bioships designed to force open gaps in a target's hull and allow ambulators to enter. Unless the Travellers precipitated combat early, the lance requires one round to reach *Deepnight Revelation*. It is too late to evade once the projectile is in motion but the Travellers could fire weapons at it in the hope of shooting it down. However, they are likely to underestimate how difficult it will be to stop this weapon.

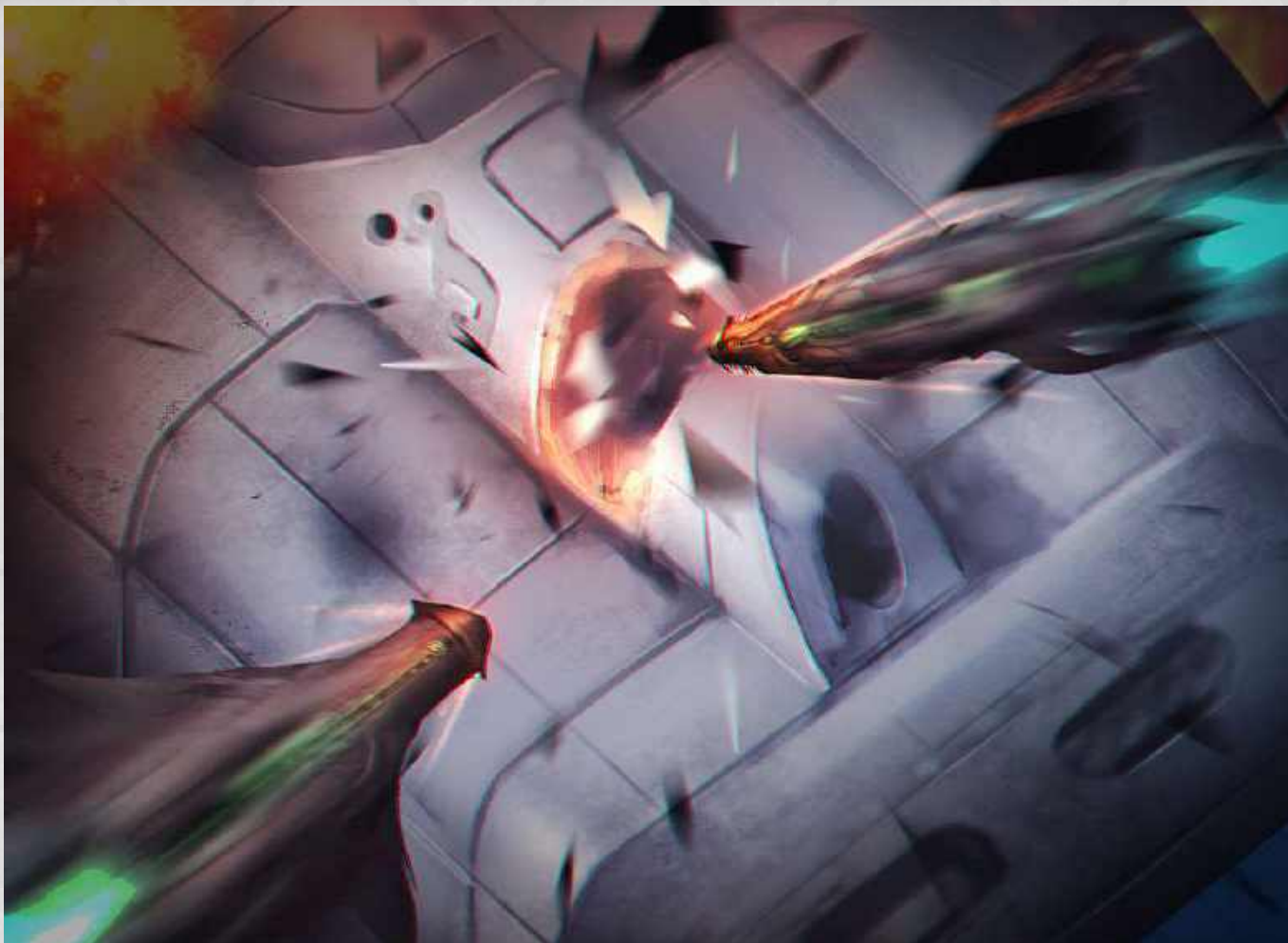
Point defence batteries are entirely ineffective. Standard laser weapons can be brought to bear but do half damage. Barbettes and larger mounts cannot slew fast enough to track a missile, although they are effective against a bioship. At most a quarter of the ship's turrets can be brought to bear on a target this close to the hull. The lance has no armour but requires 1,000 points of damage to disperse. It is highly unlikely the Travellers will manage to deliver that in one round, so unless they fired first they will be hit. If they do fire first, a battle between *Deepnight Revelation* and the Great Bioship begins at Close or Medium range.

If the lance does strike home, the immediate effect is 2DD damage, reduced by armour. If any of this damage breaks through armour – which is almost certain – the projectile will have anchored itself and begun rapidly pushing root-like growths into the vessel's armour. The first round after impact the Travellers will become aware of damage alarms from a spreading area around the impact zone. This is accompanied by a horrible creaking sound as armour and hull plates are buckled or pushed off their mounts. 12DD damage is taken this round and there is a two in six chance *Deepnight Revelation* loses a point of armour.

There is no further damage in subsequent rounds, although that might not be apparent amid the warnings of minor air and water leaks, hull distortion and control pathway interruption. External cameras show there is something like a tree sticking out of the hull, complete with roots that can be seen pushing into the gaps between plates. There are also creatures moving on the hull as if seeking something. They are recognisable as ambulator bodies used by the Biologicals and their movements are purposeful. It is possible they will eventually find a weak spot and enter the hull.

The Travellers may not realise this at first, and might learn through painful experience, but once anchored a spreader projectile will continue to grow for some time. After the initial damage is done the rate of growth drops off rapidly. However, the projectile will continue to push roots into the target, consuming its own internal tissues to feed the growth. The result is a slow degeneration of the projectile into brown sludge. Every hour the target vessel takes one point of hull damage and the projectile degenerates by D3 hull points, applied against whatever remains of the projectile at the time of impact. So, if the Travellers managed to do 100 points of damage to the lance – which requires 1,000 points to destroy it – 900 points remain. It will take on average around 450 hours – two and a half weeks – to degenerate into sludge, doing an additional 450 points of damage to the hull of the Travellers' ship.

This process can be shortened by destroying the projectile. Hull-mounted weapons cannot usually be brought to bear on a target embedded in the hull but it is possible some may be able to hit it. A projectile cannot be completely burned away in this manner; not without taking a fair amount of the hull with it. However, it may be possible to destroy the upper parts of a projectile with carefully directed weapon fire. A weapon on the hull of *Deepnight Revelation* can eliminate at most a third of the projectile's remaining hull points. One mounted on a small craft could take out up to two thirds. The remainder of the projectile must be



eliminated by personnel or drones operating close to it. This is not an especially difficult task for an experienced crew but there are always the ambulators that will defend the projectile.

Elimination of the lance can be accomplished at leisure once the fight is over but the Travellers may not realise this and they may find themselves frantically trying to burn away spreading roots as they fight the Great Bioship. The arrival of additional projectiles on the hull might impose new difficulties for the Travellers to deal with or could endanger personnel on the hull.

Fighting the Great Bioship

The battle with the Great Bioship should be treated as a roleplaying situation rather than straight starship combat. The Travellers know little about the bioships and will have decisions to make based upon patchy information. Rather than have the Great Bioship go all-out to try to annihilate *Deepnight Revelation*, the Referee should play it as an erratic and confusing opponent. Ideally the Travellers will not know how much danger they are in or how to best go about dealing with

it. If they opt for an all-out attack the Great Bioship will use all the weapons at its disposal in retaliation but since every shot costs it part of its structure it would normally be more restrained.

The Travellers may eventually figure out that the Great Bioship's weapons lack range and their own drive provides sufficiently greater mobility that they can dictate the range of engagement. The Great Bioship cannot jump away without a preparation period measured in days or weeks, so its only recourse once it realises it is losing is to flee. If the Travellers still press their attack the Great Bioship will suddenly reverse course and hope to get into range for an all-out attack. This is the limit of its tactical ability, although the Travellers may not realise how unintelligent it is. Playing out the combat as a series of problems to be solved allows the Travellers to learn about the bioships, gaining information that could be vital later in the adventure.

It is not necessary to present full *High Guard* specifications for the Great Bioship as it does not obey the normal ship construction rules. The Great Bioship

currently masses some 112,000 tons and is capable of 2g acceleration when necessary. It can make a two-parsec jump after a lengthy period of preparation. It currently has 112,000 hull points and eight points of armour, so killing it will be a challenge. The Referee should note that lasers and energy weapons do half damage after penetrating armour due to the structure of the bioship's hull.

The Great Bioship has a maximum capability of 11 lance missiles, including the one already fired at the Travellers' ship. In addition it has 112 nodes for major weapons, 1,120 nodes for intermediate weapons and 11,200 minor weapons. The Referee need not specify exactly what mix is carried before the fight begins, instead selecting an attack mode suitable to the current circumstances subject to the maximums noted above. Details of the weapons used by the *Great Bioship* are found on page 88.

Tension can be increased by targeting different parts of the ship. The Travellers may find themselves with three lances and several spears incoming, a group of corrosive gobbets or driver projectiles on the main hull, a spreader lance forcing a hole into one of the hangar bays and a hail of smaller weapons striking the hull or confusing fire control. Minor weapons such as darts and javelins can be ignored for the most part if the battle is handled in a roleplaying rather than wargaming manner – point defences can be assumed to have stopped these small projectiles, making them part of the backdrop rather than having to resolve each attack in detail. As always, if the Travellers exploit this emphasis on drama rather than wargaming to gain advantages the Referee should respond in kind.

Damage done by the Travellers is simply counted against Hull points, as the Great Bioship's systems are so dispersed the structure will have to be blasted apart to stop it functioning. Doing this much damage might be difficult but eventually the Great Bioship will run out of major weapons or the Travellers will figure out they can stand off beyond Medium range and destroy the Great Bioship at their leisure. They will have to do this or leave it alone; it does not comprehend the concept of surrender and has no way to communicate even if it wanted to do so. The Travellers may eventually be saddened at having to reduce this great starfaring thing to a scattering of plant fibres but there is simply no alternative.

Once the Great Bioship is more or less helpless the fight is over. Its final destruction can be narrated rather than played out. The most efficient method would be to use particle accelerator and fusion gun fire to methodically chop matter away from the embedded jump drive. The Travellers may be wary of getting too close, however,

in case the expanding cloud of plant matter contains corrosive materials. This is a reasonable concern, and at the Referee's discretion there could indeed be dangers in the fibre cloud including floating ambulators and corrosive materials.

Some of the plant material, or sludge from used up energy-storing tissues, will inevitably stick to *Deepnight Revelation's* hull. If the Travellers do not clean it off somehow they will eventually find bioship tissues growing on her outer surfaces. It is quite possible the Travellers may journey on in what it beginning to look like a flying forest. These tissues might cause some minor damage over time and will interfere with sensors, so at some point the Travellers are going to have to undertake a cleaning process.

It is likely the bioship's braincase will survive the clash. If so, it will be surrounded by a clump of plant matter that will protect it for some time – probably years. If there is a habitable planet in the system it might even survive atmospheric entry and begin growing there but this is unlikely. If the braincase does survive it will learn from the experience and may eventually grow a new ship around itself. This process is likely to take thousands of years, however, so even if its braincase is not destroyed the Great Bioship is out of the picture.

Investigating the Great Bioship

Preliminary investigation of the Great Bioship will not take more than a day or so unless extreme caution is exercised towards any samples brought aboard. It can quickly be established that the bioship is extremely similar to the ambulator bodies previously encountered and that its tissues bear signs of a similar counteragent to that found in the *Deepnight Legacy* adventure and other points since. There is no sign of connection to the Deepnight Entity other than this partial immunity to infestation. More detailed study will take some time and absorb some of the expedition's research resources.

Determining the Great Bioship's capabilities is a Short, Routine research project for the Life Sciences team or a specialist research group. Upon completion the Travellers will know the following:

- The Great Bioship is capable of 2g acceleration and jump-2, although the latter requires a lengthy charging time.
- These capabilities are provided by systems similar to their technological equivalents but spaced throughout the Great Bioship's hull.
- It is probable that these capabilities were engineered rather than developed naturally. They mimic existing technologies too closely for an accidental similarity to be at all likely.

- The Great Bioship was more than likely controlled by one or more braincases like other bodies. Some braincases may have been recovered.
- The Great Bioship was armed with weapons grown as parts of itself, using the same technology.
- The Great Bioship does not appear to have been sentient in the usual sense, nor did it carry a sentient crew.

All this points to the Great Bioship being part of a genetic engineering project, probably on the part of Oyskrusk and his crew. The Travellers will gain the strong (and correct) impression that it was essentially an ambulator body capable of operating in space and thus part of the grouping known as the Biologicals.

Investigating the presence of the jump drive is a Short, Average research project for the Ship Science team. Upon completion they will be reasonably sure that this is the drive from a human starship – almost certainly the battlecruiser encountered at the rimward fringe of the Far Side of Nowhere. The question of what the Great Bioship wanted with it and how it was recognised is a more complex one but eventually the scientists will come up with a working hypothesis – the Great Bioship wanted the jump drive because it somehow recognised its potential. Its own biological drive was extremely inefficient, so if it could somehow integrate the technological drive with its own systems it would gain an unprecedented level of mobility. This does raise questions about what other systems could be integrated. What if bioships gained access to ‘proper’ starship weapons to go with enhanced jump capability? At present there are no clear answers to this question.

The Origins of the Great Bioship can be traced using a complex analysis of absorbed radiation in energy-storage tissues and other apparently trivial data. This information is important to the storyline of the adventure, so should be conveyed to the Travellers at

a suitable point. Whether the Travellers tell them to or not, the ship’s scientists will undertake an investigation leading to the announcement that the Great Bioship’s point of origin has been determined.

The scientists’ presentation is lengthy and they will not appreciate being told to just get to the point since what they have done is creative and very clever. By comparing energy absorbed in tissues from the Great Bioship, along with the effects of high-energy states such as those experienced when entering jump and chemical markers in the ship’s tissues, which give a general idea of what sort of planet it grew on and how long it spent there... the explanation goes on a while but the final analysis is this:

The Great Bioship grew in the soil of an Earth-like world, with a taint in the atmosphere from high levels of volcanic activity. It probably grew over 30,000 years or so before finally leaving its homeworld. This was around 25,000 years ago and in the intervening time it has spent centuries or even millennia in the soil of other planets. It has made hundreds of jumps but most of those were within a radius of few parsecs around what was presumable its world of origin. A few hundred years ago, for reasons that remain unexplained, the Great Bioship set out on a much longer voyage, ultimately crossing the Transition Zone and eventually encountering human starships. It now seemed to be headed back towards its point of origin.

The science team cannot be perfectly precise but they have pinpointed the Great Bioship’s origin to within half a dozen star systems. Some of those will not have habitable worlds and can be ruled out. Any that seem like a decent prospect should be investigated. There are many questions remaining unanswered about the Biologicals and this seems like a wonderful opportunity to discover more – especially since Oyskrusk and his crew seem to have been involved.



C H A P T E R - S I X

A PLACE OF DEATH

As the Travellers voyage towards the Great Bioship's presumed point of origin they will at some point enter a star system arbitrarily designated TZ-KA (Transition Zone, K type star, Anomalous). This encounter can occur at some other time in the voyage if the Referee prefers.

The TZ-KA system centres on a solo K7 (orange) star of unusual size and emission spectra. The Space Science team have a suspicion this star is beginning to expand into an orange subgiant and will eventually become a giant star. In the interim, conditions in the star system will be changing. This is of great interest to the scientists.

TZ-KA PRIMARY (K5 Pre-Subgiant Star)

Primary 1	(X510000-O)
Primary 2	(X655000-O)
Primary 3	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 4	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 5	(Large Gas Giant)
Primary 6	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 7	(X000000-O)
Primary 8	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 9	(Unstable Terrestrial)
Primary 10	(X6A1000-O)
Primary 11	(X310000-O)
Primary 12	(X7A0000-O)
Primary 13	(X500000-O)

Primary 1

The innermost planet would be an unremarkable near-rockball under most conditions but is intriguing due to its retrograde orbit. This is not yet stable, suggesting the planet was perturbed in the recent (cosmically speaking) past. The most likely cause is another body perturbed out of its orbit, either falling into the sun or passing close by the innermost planet before being flung out of the system. Such a body would have to be quite large to change an orbit so radically. The innermost planet is not a moon left behind by a perturbed body – there are signs it used to have a thicker atmosphere and even surface water. These have been stripped away by the expanding star and the eccentric retrograde orbit

now traced by this body. It is not possible to say if this world ever had life but there are some indications it may have been developing primitive single-celled organisms.

Primary 2

Primary 2 is a good candidate for an Earth-like world and the Travellers may wonder if it is the home of the Biologicals. This is not the case, although the Biologicals did attempt to settle there. Upon approach the Travellers will detect the usual hallmarks of a world with life – the atmosphere has clouds and long-range spectrographic analysis using light from the system's star suggests an oxygen-nitrogen composition. However, upon closer approach the world's land masses are revealed to be an unwelcoming mix of yellow, brown and bare-rock grey.

Even from orbit it is possible to see that the world's ecosystem is dead or dying. There is no sign of disaster or pollution, just kilometres of bare rock or dreary moss-like growths desperately clinging to life. A search will indicate signs of an infestation by the Deepnight Entity; several more or less circular areas where nothing whatsoever grows, surrounded by an uneven pattern of smaller clumps. If tested, these demonstrate traces of the entity's tissues but are dead or dormant. It is not at first clear what killed them.

One site is different. It is as dead as the rest but more recently. The area stands out as an oddly regular mound, surrounded by the same dead zone as everywhere else. Investigation reveals that the mound was once a bioship. Traces of both the Deepnight Entity and the Biologicals are present. This may raise fears of infected bioships but that is not the case – at least not here.

This world once had a thriving ecosystem. It became infested with the Deepnight Entity, which spread to several locations and began to consume the world's resources faster than the ecosystem could regenerate. The downward spiral was inevitable and one-by-one the entity's major clusters died. Where the entity at Terminus Point grew intelligent enough to realise what

was happening and take measures to prevent it, this one could do nothing but follow its nature. By a few hundred years ago, the entity had all but killed its host planet.

A bioship, needing food after a long voyage, landed in one of the few remaining viable areas. It put down roots and began taking up nutrients, before sending out ambulators to seed the surrounding area. For a time it was able to feed, and there was life on this planet once more, but ultimately the bioship came into contact with the entity. The bioship was partially immune to infestation and a war for survival began. The entity eventually won, growing within the husk of the bioship at a frantic rate as its tissues degenerated. It may even have learned to use the bioship as a mobile host but by that time the bioship had degenerated too far. It would never fly again. Thus the last cluster on this planet flourished for a time atop the carcass of its enemy, then succumbed to lack of food and died.

The Travellers may be able to deduce this from the wreck and will also find out – one way or another – that there is a risk of infection despite the entity here being dead. That raises questions about how to prevent other visitors from becoming infected, which the Travellers can answer as they please. What they will be able to learn is that the Deepnight Entity can infect a bioship or ambulator and that if allowed to run its course it will strangle its host world to feed its insatiable hunger.

Apart from routine hazards and the danger of infection, there is no real danger to the Travellers here. A detailed investigation will reveal that higher species like land animals and large fish became extinct very rapidly, followed by lesser animal species then plants. Finally the only life left was moss and similar low-value food and even this was consumed by fragments of the Deepnight Entity that came into contact with it. From this the Travellers can discern a pattern to an infestation – high-value food is consumed first, then whatever is left. There is nothing unusual about that, although what is interesting is that mobile species died off first.

The Deepnight Entity cannot move far, even by creating shamblers from local species, so some other mechanism must have been used to completely wipe out these species. Sooner or later the Travellers will find out that an entity can call creatures to it once they are infected and will use a controlled creature to infect others first if it can. When they get to Terminus Point the Travellers will discover the entity there has taken this to a whole new level but in the meantime there is a chance to find out how the entity operates.

Primary 3–6

The next three orbits out from Primary 2 are occupied by gas giant planets. As yet the star's expansion has not affected them much.

Primary 7

The seventh orbit is occupied by a sparse planetoid belt. This was once the moon system of an extremely large and only borderline-stable gas giant. A combination of changing conditions in the system and several very large moons in close orbit caused significant disruption to this body, causing it to blow off part of its atmosphere in an explosion that was nowhere near powerful enough to start a stellar fusion reaction but sufficient to destabilise the giant planet's orbit. Its moons were torn apart and left behind as a trail of debris that has since begun to settle into a new orbit, whilst the planet itself fell inward and was ultimately projected out of the system after radically perturbing the orbit of the innermost planet. The huge gas giant is currently 0.4 light-years away and departing on a slow voyage across the universe.

Primaries 8–13

Primary 8 is a normal small gas giant, whilst the bodies further out are moons (or parts of moons) left behind by the departing gas giant. The ninth orbit is occupied by a highly unstable body around the size of Mars. Without closer study it is not possible to say whether it will survive and become a stable planet or disintegrate into a new planetoid belt.

CRADLE OF THE BIOLOGICALS

Analysis of the Great Bioship indicates a region of six star systems as the probable home of the Biologicals. It will be necessary to search this region in order to find out if this is the case. Techniques such as radio archaeology will not work – the Biologicals do not produce radio-frequency emissions that could be detected. However, once the Travellers get within 30 parsecs of the region they will begin to pick up faint signals, which may have originated in one of the target systems.

The signals can be triangulated by moving a significant distance – at least 10 parsecs – in a direction more or less perpendicular to the presumed point of origin. Triangulation on this relatively narrow base cannot be extremely precise but will confirm the signals do originate in the target region. As the Travellers approach to within 20 parsecs the signals begin to become recognisable. They are the radio-frequency emissions of a technological civilisation, suggesting the signals are not coming from the Biologicals.

Within 10 parsecs it becomes possible to decipher parts of the signals. Running a match against known communications protocols indicates that all intelligible signals match the pattern used by the Dual Alliance, based in the Far Side of Nowhere. If other communications protocols are in place they are not recognised. Signals are encrypted, which is standard practice almost everywhere, so it is not possible to obtain information from most of the fragments. All that is known for sure is that somewhere ahead there are multiple sources of communications chatter matching that used by the Dual Alliance.

Most emissions are centred in one star system, with a few sources elsewhere. At seven parsecs out from the point of origin the emissions suddenly stop. Nothing can be detected closer to the presumed point of origin. Since radio-frequency signals propagate at the speed of light this suggests that around 20 years ago all transmissions simply ceased. There are few possible explanations and all imply a disaster befell whoever was producing this chatter.

0306 PPBO ALPHA

Arbitrarily designated Probable Point of Biologicals' Origin Alpha, the PPBO Alpha system orbits an F3 (yellow-white) main sequence star. The system contains two planetoid belts and two small gas giants in addition to a promising inner terrestrial and a cold methane-atmosphere world in the outsystem.

PPBO ALPHA Primary (F3 Main Sequence Star)

Primary 1	(X5A2000-0)
Primary 2	(X000000-0)
Primary 3	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 4	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 5	(X000000-0)
Primary 6	(X8A1000-0)

Primary 1

The innermost planet seems like a reasonable prospect for a life-bearing planet, which could be the Biologicals' homeworld. However, as *Deepnight Revelation* approaches it becomes apparent the world is too hot for this to be likely. There is a small amount of surface water but it is concentrated in deep basins close to the poles and is very salty due to evaporation. The planet's magnetic field is also rather weak, allowing its atmosphere to be slowly stripped away. What remains is a thin envelope of unbreathable and relatively heavy gases such as carbon dioxide. Life is limited to a few types of single-cell organisms. Whilst interesting to the Life Sciences team this world is a bust as far as finding the Biologicals goes.

0505 PPBO BETA

Designated Probable Point of Biologicals' Origin Beta, PPBO Beta is a main sequence star system with seven planetary bodies. It is not a strong prospect as the source of the signals but the Travellers may realise that the signals and the Biologicals could have different sources.

The system has two small and unremarkable gas giants and a collection of uninhabitable terrestrial planets. The third orbit is occupied by a water world with an

BIOLOGICALS REGION MAP

 AUTOMATED SIGNAL
ON PRIMARY 3

 DRAYTSERV



POINT OF INTEREST
QUICK SYSTEM GENERATION

unbreathable methane-nitrogen atmosphere. An orbital beacon is transmitting at low power – insufficient to be detected beyond the star system but enough to attract attention within it. Other bodies can be investigated in the interests of science or exploration but there is nothing to be learned about the Biologicals there.

PPBO BETA PRIMARY (F2 Main Sequence Star)

Primary 1	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 2	(X510000-0)
Primary 3	(X7AA000-0)
Primary 4	(X600000-0)
Primary 5	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 6	(X7A0000-0)
Primary 7	(X310000-0)

Primary 3 and the Wreck

The signal is coming from a position in high orbit that will remain viable for several decades more, although it only has power for a few more years. There are no craft in orbit however; only a small emergency beacon. If the Travellers are familiar with the communications protocols of the Dual Alliance they can confirm the beacon came from a ship built to the standards of the Alliance. This does not necessarily mean it is a Dual Alliance vessel but the implication is strong. Deciphering the signal gives an automated message – in the Droyne language of Oynprith – and a large amount of log data which is heavily encrypted. It can be cracked but this will take hundreds of hours of work even with the resources aboard *Deepnight Revelation*.

The automated-verbal message is not encrypted. Although it is in Oynprith, the Travellers can easily translate as it is one of the standard languages of Charted Space and included in every linguistic database as a matter of course. Even here, beyond the Far Side of Nowhere, Oynprith is spoken in virtually unchanged form. How this can be is a mystery that may puzzle scientists for generations from here to Charted Space; the Travellers will be aware this is an enigma they will not be able to unravel at the present time.

The message reads:

Ship Esissath Down. Distress Indicated. Assistance Required. Location Follows.

A set of coordinates follows, using a standard form readily useable by the Travellers. The location is on the planet below, a water world with a few small islands above sea level. The world has no moons and so no

tides. Other than a storm surge or other weather-induced variation these small land masses will be permanently above sea level. A metallic mass can be detected on one of the islands, far too dense to be a natural formation. There are no power readings from the wreck however and, since the world does not have a breathable atmosphere, the chances of finding anyone alive are virtually nil.

The wreck is recognisable as a vessel very similar to the one encountered in *The Crossing* – which was also wrecked. This may cause the Travellers to wonder if there was something wrong with the drives used by the Dual Alliance but at this point there are no answers to that question to be had. The wreck is of the same general form as the one explored earlier and may be an example of the same class of ship. It is more intact but still obviously in a dreadful state.

The wreck lies in a wide saltmarsh, partially submerged. It has obvious structural damage from a heavy landing, with some distortion of hull elements. There is vegetation growing up the sides of the craft, suggesting it has been here for some time. The wreck has no power signatures of any kind and life scanners or similar equipment give no indication of survivors.

Landing near the wreck is a challenge. Most of the available 'land' is actually clumps of reed-like growths protruding from a muddy bed under half a metre of water. Unless the Travellers just want to eyeball it, a Very Difficult (12+) Pilot check is needed. If this check is failed the craft will sink into the mud at an awkward angle, with possibly as much as three metres difference between the level of its landing feet. This will pose a challenge when trying to take off again, which may worry the Travellers if they think they may have to make a quick escape. It will also make it difficult to get out of the craft without allowing large quantities of muddy seawater inside. The Travellers may have to clamber out of the emergency roof hatches and rig an improvised ladder just to reach the 'ground' – and all of this must be done in a vacc suit or using breathing gear.

An alternative would be to carefully seek a landing site that can support the craft, which will require flying around for over an hour whilst being highly visible to anyone on the ground. A site can eventually be found, although it is over two kilometres away. In this case reaching the crashed ship requires slogging through knee to waist deep water, struggling through reed-beds and occasionally having to drag colleagues out of deep mud. All this activity uses up oxygen at a high rate, which may raise concerns. It is also very difficult to keep a good lookout when every step requires considerable effort.

Clever Travellers might decide to lower some of their number on to the wreck from a hovering craft and then seek a landing site or fly a holding pattern whilst the others are exploring. How the Travellers solve the problem of reaching the wreck is up to them but what they choose to do will affect their ability to get away again. The Referee should make as much as possible of the tension in the situation – the Travellers are going into an unknown situation on an alien world, with limited oxygen and an unbreathable atmosphere outside, with no easy escape route. There should be many opportunities for suspicious movements, sounds carried on the alien wind and other distractions that might make the Travellers jumpy or complacent.

The Travellers can gain access to the wreck by way of an airlock or hull breach. The latter appears to have been caused in the crash and there is no sign of weapons fire. Airlocks have creeper-like vegetation growing around them, forcing the doors open in a similar manner to the weapons used by the Great Bioship. The vegetation is different to the local reeds and appears unhealthy. This may worry the Travellers but the Deepnight Entity is not present here. The reason for the unhealthy vegetation is that it is a hybrid of local and Biological tissues and the latter are not adapted to the salty environment.

The wreck is completely powerless and therefore lightless. The inside of the ship has been plundered by clumsy ambulators and all drive mechanisms have been removed. 'Removed' in this context appears to mean 'smashed up and ripped out', although there are signs that tools were used in some cases. There is nothing left of the power plant, either, other than fragments too seriously damaged in the removal process to be any use.

The crew are also missing but what is apparent is that this ship is different in an important way to the one the Travellers previously encountered. Whereas that one was set up for a mixed crew, this one has no seats, beds or other equipment suitable for humans. It is a purely Droyne ship, although built to exactly the same specification as the previously encountered vessel.

Whilst the Travellers are exploring the lifeless wreck they will be attacked by a group of somewhat sickly ambulators. The exact number can be tailored by the Referee to provide a challenge without overwhelming the Travellers. The resulting fight will be either a scramble in the dark inside the wreck or a brawl in the muddy water outside. Once this obstacle is overcome the Travellers will be able to locate data storage devices and download the full logs of the vessel.

Logs of the *Esissath*

Log data from the beacon is mundane, mostly dealing with navigational reference points. It is intended to allow the ship's movements to be traced and contains little information on the events of the voyage. A full download from the wreck itself will provide a much clearer picture of what happened. The *Esissath* was built in the Dual Alliance around a century ago. She was crewed exclusively by Droyne, since her mission was to re-establish contact with the enclave at Draytsirv.

The logs contain a surprisingly candid account of how the crew tried to persuade the people of Draytsirv to free themselves. They meant well and thought they could succeed but simply did not understand the nature of the threat. The crew fought bravely (if their account is to be believed) in the resulting conflict but were forced to witness their allies slain in their thousands as block after block of the city fell. Eventually they made the decision to flee, carrying a warning and samples of the Biologicals under what they thought was strict security.

The log ends with images from the final battle aboard the *Esissath* and subsequent crash-landing. The last images show the bridge doors being forced and ambulators entering. The last of the crew fire their weapons and slash at tendrils but one-by-one they are brought down. The Travellers will note that those whose breathing masks are still on are not killed; they are dragged out of the ship and beyond the reach of its sensors.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CREW?

Most of the crew of the *Esissath* were killed in the fighting or lost their breathing gear and suffocated. Those that did not were taken aboard a bioship as captives. The Biologicals wanted to find out more about them, since these were creatures who could operate the jump drives the Biologicals had obtained. Some of them survived the trip to the Biologicals homeworld and may be encountered later in the adventure.

0506 PPBO GAMMA

The PPBO Gamma system is a trinary, with a pair of type M (red) main sequence stars orbiting one another as a distant companion to the slightly more massive M2 primary. The primary system contains three gas giants, two planetoid belts, of which the outer one is very sparse, and a collection of terrestrial planets. The outer two are more or less rockballs, with a little ice present on the outermost. The inner planets are of interest, however. The secondary system contains a couple of lifeless small terrestrial planets and an unremarkable gas giant.

PPBO GAMMA PRIMARY (M2 Main Sequence Star)

Primary 1	(X77A000-0)
Primary 2	(X31A000-0)
Primary 3	(X000000-0)
Primary 4	(Large Gas Giant)
Primary 5	(Large Gas Giant)
Primary 6	(X720000-0)
Primary 7	(X000000-0)
Primary 8	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 9	(X101000-0)

PPBO GAMMA SECONDARY A (M4 Main Sequence Star)

Secondary 1	(X410000-0)
Secondary 2	(X4A0000-0)
Secondary 3	(Small Gas Giant)

PPBO GAMMA SECONDARY B (M6 Main Sequence Star)

Primary 1

The innermost planet seems like a very good candidate for a homeworld, at least from a distance. It is a little warm but clearly has plenty of water, if the thick cloud cover is anything to judge by. Unfortunately, this is the problem; as *Deepnight Revelation* begins an orbital scan it is clear that this is a deep-water world. There is absolutely no land above sea level and minimal ice cap coverage due to the high average temperature.

There is life on Primary 1, some of it quite complex, but no signs of the Biologicals. The Travellers may wonder if there is an aquatic form used by them but whilst that is true there is no presence on this world. The Life Sciences team may request at least a few days of study here since the apex predator niche appears to be occupied by gigantic jellyfish-like creatures. These are certainly interesting but studying them will not advance the mission to find the Biologicals' homeworld.

Primary 2

Planet Two would be an iceball world if it were a little farther out from the star but is instead a 'slushball' covered in mostly-frozen water. Its thin envelope of atmospheric gas is insufficient to prevent this ice from

slowly being boiled away. In a few million years this planet will be a waterless rockball but for now it remains a treacherous half-frozen water world. Landing here will require some creativity, to say the least.

0606 PPBO DELTA

The PPBO Delta system orbits a G3 (yellow) main sequence star. The system contains two planetoid belts, three gas giants and an assortment of terrestrial planets. The two outermost of these both have dense heavy-gas atmospheres and a covering of 'ice' that contains water along with many other chemicals. The two inner terrestrial planets are both points of interest.

PPBO DELTA PRIMARY(G3 Main Sequence Star)

Primary 1	(X000000-0)
Primary 2	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 3	Draytsirv (X667000-0)
Primary 4	(X220000-0)
Primary 5	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 6	(X000000-0)
Primary 7	(X5A7000-0)
Primary 8	(X3AA000-0)
Primary 9	(Small Gas Giant)

Draytsirv

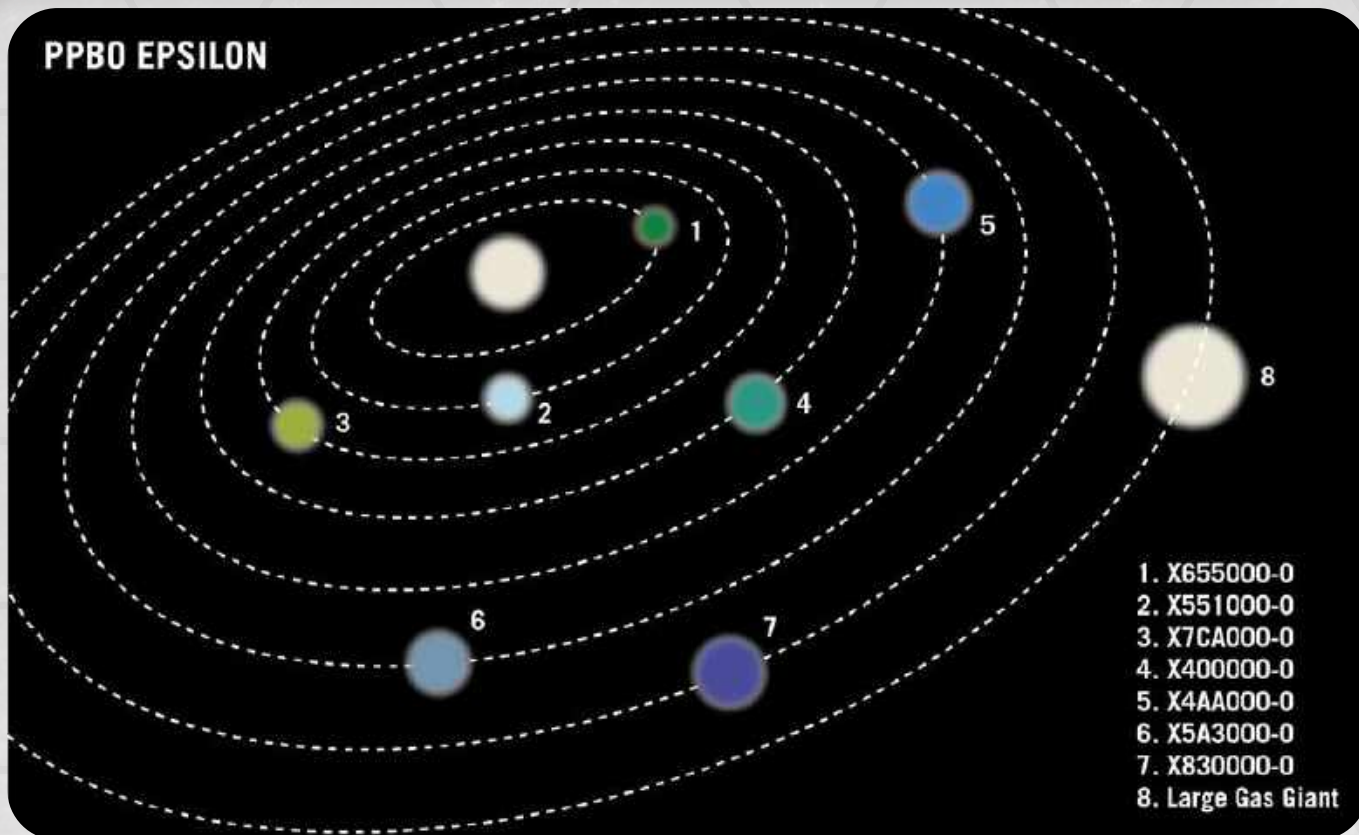
Draytsirv is an Earth-like, temperate world with abundant life. Its soil composition is not to the Biologicals' liking due to the presence of trace materials incompatible with their metabolism. They can exist on Draytsirv but do not thrive as they might elsewhere. For that reason their presence was originally confined to areas with more suitable conditions but once they discovered the Droyne colony on Draytsirv was a potential source of jump drives and other technologies, the Biologicals increased their presence.

An orbital survey reveals a lush, green world with no traces of habitation other than one large island chain. There are obvious ruins on several of the islands and a city that seems overgrown but more or less intact. There are no power sources active, no transmissions or replies to communications and no signs that the cities are inhabited at all. The state of overgrowth suggests perhaps a century or so since abandonment but this impression is false. The Travellers' visit to Draytsirv will be an adventure in its own right and is described on page 30.

Primary 4

Primary 4 is too small to retain much of an atmosphere but its dense composition has allowed it to keep sufficient heavy gases that a vacc suit is not absolutely required. A breathing mask and protection from the low

PPBO EPSILON



pressure and cold will be necessary however. The planet is in many ways a typical near-rockball but its dense composition allows it to retain a thin envelope of heavy gases such as carbon dioxide.

0605 PPBO EPSILON

The PPBO Epsilon system orbits a bright F7 (yellow-white) main sequence star and its M6 (red) companion. The inner system is hot and bright, with no planetoid belts or gas giants. There is a single gas giant in a far orbit but if *Deepnight Revelation* refuels from it there will be a long transit across the system to the inner worlds. Epsilon 3 is a corrosive hellworld, whilst the outer terrestrial planets (Epsilon 4-7) are uninhabitable. Some have atmospheres of unbreathable gases; Epsilon 4 is a rockball in the truest sense. The inner two are far more interesting.

Epsilon 1

Epsilon 1 is a garden world, which still has the remains of its original ecosystem. However, it was discovered long ago by a bioship that landed for a while and seeded the planet. Now, large areas have been taken over by the Biologicals, creating hybrid

PPBO EPSILON PRIMARY (F7 Main Sequence Star) PPBO EPSILON COMPANION (M6 Main Sequence Star)

Epsilon 1	(X655000-0)
Epsilon 2	(X551000-0)
Epsilon 3	(X7CA000-0)
Epsilon 4	(X400000-0)
Epsilon 5	(X4AA000-0)
Epsilon 6	(X5A3000-0)
Epsilon 7	(X830000-0)
Epsilon 8	(Large Gas Giant)

forests that cover significant parts of the useable land. Some animal species have been wiped out but those that do not pose a threat to the Biologicals are simply ignored. Thus the plains, mountains and seas retain their original character whilst the forested areas have changed enormously. This might be taken as an example of how a planet like Wildwood will eventually develop if the Biologicals are permitted to gain a foothold. On the other hand, astute Travellers will realise that the Biologicals do not conquer for

its own sake. They grow where they can but anyone (or anything) living in an area inhospitable to the Biologicals can continue to exist unmolested.

If the Travellers land on Epsilon 1 and explore they will find little sign of intrusion by the Biologicals outside the lush forests but these have many localised enclaves and scatterings in between them. There are few ambulators; the Biologicals have simply taken root and grown to out from a few centralised spots, sending the occasional expedition to seed a new location. The Biologicals of Epsilon 1 are not – initially at least – a threat. They are not intrinsically hostile to starfarers or to fleshy beings in general and if the Travellers simply explore the forests they will not be harmed or interfered with. Even taking a few samples – including a braincase or two – will not incite a response.

The Travellers can learn more about the Biologicals in this manner. Crucially, they are not territorial for its own sake. Threats are eliminated but activity that falls within the boundaries of normal ecosystem interactions will not trigger a response. In short, a few animals nibbling shoots from a Biological's static plant body will be tolerated but serious damage to the plant will result in countermeasures. These might take the form of strikes with mobile appendages or the intervention of an ambulator. In some cases spitter pods are grown here and there, with intruders shot when they become a nuisance.

If the Travellers provoke the forests they will become a deathtrap. Initially this is passive; vines will snare passers-by when they come into range, spitters will shoot from ambush and spiny limbs will lash the Travellers. If they persist, ambulators will be summoned to attack the Travellers and pursue them. The moment a given enclave begins to perceive a serious threat might be obvious to the Travellers as ripples of movement through the vegetation carry information about the Travellers and their location.

Overall, it is possible to land on Epsilon 1 and conduct research into a world where the Biologicals are well entrenched without getting into a life-threatening situation. However, the Travellers are likely to land themselves in trouble if they are aggressive or paranoid. It might be that the first ambulators they encounter would have simply ignored them if they had not opened fire but once a conflict starts the whole forest becomes the enemy.

Epsilon 2

Epsilon 2 is a cold desert world on the outer edge of the system's warm zone. What little water it has tends to be frozen for most of the year, with plant life showing intermittent spurts of growth whenever there is a thaw. As a result the world is not welcoming to the Biologicals, whose bioships have visited the planet but made no attempt to settle there.

0606 PPBO ZETA

The PPBO Zeta system centres on a K7 (orange) main sequence star. Gravitational interaction between the system's four gas giants may have caused some planets to fail to form; there are three planetoid belts and a terrestrial that never formed properly, creating an unstable planet-sized mass of rock, which occasionally undergoes extremely violent tremors. Of the remaining eight bodies, most are rockballs or otherwise uninhabitable.

The second orbit is occupied by a promising candidate for the Biologicals' homeworld. A large, wet world with considerable volcanism and a tainted atmosphere, this planet exhibits the classic signs of being life-bearing when scanned from a distance. As the Travellers approach it will become clear that this is a world with a huge Biological presence and eventually they will realise they have discovered the homeworld. See *Biology Experiment* on page 40 for details of the Travellers' adventures on Zeta 2.

PPBO ZETA PRIMARY (K7 Main Sequence Star)

- Zeta 1 (Small Gas Giant)
- Zeta 2 (X877000-0)
- Zeta 3 (X510000-0)
- Zeta 4 (X000000-0)
- Zeta 5 (Small Gas Giant)
- Zeta 6 (Small Gas Giant)
- Zeta 7 (X000000-0)
- Zeta 8 (Unstable Terrestrial)
- Zeta 9 (X200000-0)
- Zeta 10 (Large Gas Giant)
- Zeta 11 (XAAA000-0)
- Zeta 12 (X000000-0)
- Zeta 13 (X200000-0)
- Zeta 14 (X101000-0)

DRAYTSIRV

Draytsirv is world well suited to Droyne, with modest surface gravity, abundant water and a comfortable atmosphere. At the time settlers from the Dual Alliance arrived the Biologicals were already established in some areas but these were small regions where conditions best suited them. The Droyne had different requirements and chose a group of islands as their initial point of settlement.

The logic behind this was sound; an island could be thoroughly scouted and brought under control with relative ease. It was self-contained with natural frontiers, permitting a methodical expansion that suited the Droyne mindset. The chosen islands were large, with smaller bodies in between them, and expansion took the form of carefully planned island-hopping. Whilst one island was being tamed and developed, others were being scouted or seeded with small outposts. Some were earmarked as industrial sites or cities, others given over to agriculture.

The Droyne of Draytsirv had an enormous impact on the local area but almost none elsewhere. They sent expeditions to explore their new world but focussed heavily on their own small region. This pattern is common in colonisation by starfaring societies, which tend to view any part of a planet they are not currently using as irrelevant. The colonists at Draytsirv were confident there was nothing on the planet that could harm their high-technology society. In this case they were disastrously wrong.

The expedition had limited equipment but was well planned. Using what they brought, and the materials that arrived in a handful of follow-up missions, the Droyne built themselves an interim base with an emphasis on security and industrial production. They seized resource-rich sites on the islands and nearby land masses and cleared some of the islands to rapidly create an agricultural base. Then work began on a city. Others followed as the population grew.

Each city was built on a different island, designed and constructed as a unit before inhabitants moved in. Everything was carefully planned out and the project went almost flawlessly. Within a few decades the islands were tamed and orderly, self-contained cities standing

on many of them. The Droyne had few grav vehicles, so they built roadways and bridges between the islands. Eventually they were able to build their own starships.

These Droyne were not the Ancients, with near-mystical levels of technology. They possessed a solid TL10 base and were capable of building structures that were both functional and elegant. The spires of their cities were not high by the standards of a TL15 Imperial world but they were beautiful to behold. The cities were almost entirely 'clean' in the sense that they produced no emissions harmful to the local environment. This may have been a factor in delaying conflict with the Biologicals, although geography is equally likely.

The Droyne had an extensive aquaculture industry, farming plants on the seabed and 'herding' shoals of fish. Small automated seed mining plants produced much of what the culture needed. As a result food was abundant, resources plentiful and life easy. Society moved from one focussed on building and surviving to one pursuing art, science and exploration. When industry was not concentrating on building a new city or expanding the industrial base, spacecraft and starships were built. These were modest exploration ships, conducting surveys of the system and surrounding region of space with no great sense of urgency.

Ironically perhaps, conflict with the Biologicals did not occur as a result of anything that happened on Draytsirv. Expeditions encountered regions of strange plant life and became intrigued. Semi-permanent observation facilities were created nearby, which rapidly became known to the Biologicals. They were not a threat and could not be used so were simply ignored. There were a few casualties on each side as expeditions triggered a response but for the most part they did little harm and remained below the threshold for a response.

Exploration ships encountered evidence of bioships and naturally began to investigate. This led to a clash, for reasons that will probably never be known, and in the wreckage the bioship discovered a technological jump drive. Other exploration ships began to be attacked but it was some years before the connection between the Droyne of Draytsirv and the drives was made. It is unlikely this happened in the same way a human or Droyne might come to a realisation but eventually the Biologicals

learned that jump drives existed and could be assimilated into their bioships. They wanted this capability in the same way a plant wants to put out roots or produce flowers and they knew where it could be obtained.

The first attempts to overrun the Droyne were piecemeal and ineffectual, despite them catching a peaceful people, who thought they faced no threats more or less, unawares. Incidents with bioships were a concern but the Droyne had not prepared for a ground war. Their few aerospace defences were adequate to deal with the bioship threat, they thought, and made no preparations beyond this. The first encounters on the ground reinforced this sense of complacency.

The Biologicals' efforts intensified, with the creation of enclaves on the mainland close to the Droyne cities. The sea was a barrier that could be crossed by creating sea-going ambulators. This took time but eventually a horde of ambulators was disgorged onto one of the islands. The Droyne city there was rapidly overrun and the population massacred, although some fled across the bridges to other islands. Had the Biologicals thought like other creatures they might have exterminated the Droyne in a matter of weeks but instead of island-hopping they took root, growing weak ambulators in soil ill-suited to them.

This gave the Droyne a chance to prepare. Aquacultural submarines became improvised combat platforms, valiantly resisting further incursions until proper combat vessels were ready. Aggressive patrols literally rooted out enclaves of Biologicals before they could become established. For a time the Droyne thought they could prevail but eventually another city was swarmed, then another until only one remained. After many years of humiliating and fearful propitiation the Droyne were convinced they could free themselves by a visiting starship crew. Their uprising was doomed from the start and soon their last city was overrun. A few Droyne did escape to the mainland, scratching out a life as refugees.

APPROACHING DRAYTSIRV

As the Travellers approach the planet the remains of the Droyne cities will be obvious. Most are heavily overgrown, with almost all structures collapsed. A couple of tall buildings may have survived but are covered with creepers actively trying to pull them down. Investigation of any overgrown building reveals roots and creepers forcing their way into any cracks or crevices and widening them in the same manner as a spreader missile.

One city is more or less intact, although heavily overgrown. There are even a few power emissions here and there, although they are weak and there is no

response to communications. It will, at first, seem that centuries have passed since the cities were abandoned but the Travellers will eventually realise the fall of Draytsirv was far more recent. The last city fell just 20 years ago, around the time the *Esissath* visited. This is not, as the Travellers will discover, coincidental.

There are three obvious types of location in the island chain:

Overgrown Islands: These have no sign of large-scale habitation and were agricultural sites or unused islands, quickly abandoned and overrun by the Biologicals. Most are now covered in a low forest of creepers, with grow-vines concealed here and there. These produce the occasional ambulator and have fixed defences in the form of patches of vines equipped with spitters. Little sign remains of the Droyne population in these places.

Overgrown City Islands: These have occasional intact structures and obvious signs of previous habitation. These areas are very similar to other overgrown islands but the mass of creepers may conceal the remains of vehicles, machinery or buildings.

Partially Overgrown Island: This island has markedly less vegetation than the others. Much of it is covered by uncontrolled growth but there is a mostly intact city that has only been partially covered. There is also a wide open area of what appears to be fused rock – a typical starport landing apron – which is mostly clear of vegetation. A couple of what appear to be spacecraft are landed on the apron and there are shapes of what may be others along the overgrown fringes of the pad. There is also what appears to be a deep-water dock close to the city, linked to it by the collapsed remains of a railway or elevated road. The bridges to this island have all collapsed or been destroyed. This island has several burned or blasted areas where absolutely nothing grows.

MAKING A LANDING

Landing is something of a problem in the island chain. Most of the available flat land is covered with rampant vegetation, some of which may contain Biologicals. It may also conceal uneven ground or other hazards. If the Travellers do manage to set down on one of the overgrown islands they risk their ship's landing gear or other projections being gripped by creepers, which will make it difficult to take off again. This process will take at least a few hours but does occur quickly enough to be spotted by watchful Travellers.

Landing in an area in contact with the local vegetation will inform the Biologicals a spacecraft has arrived. The Travellers will notice a rustling and shivering in the local foliage, taking the form of a series of ripples



spreading out from wherever they are. They may have witnessed this before and sooner or later will realise that messages can be sent this way. The Biologicals will act immediately upon learning a ship has landed but not in an organised manner. Ambulators will start moving towards the ship with the intent of securing it. If they cannot gain entry they will grip any parts they can and extend roots into the ground. If the Travellers are gone long they may have to cut their shuttle free whilst battling other ambulators.

The obvious place to land is also by far the safest. The starport landing apron is more or less free of vegetation and was constructed for the specific purpose of supporting starships. Landing there can be accomplished with little difficulty and will not alert the Biologicals' that a ship is present. The port is located close to the mostly-intact city, which is the obvious place to start looking for answers.

The Bridges

The bridges leading to other islands have all collapsed, in a manner that suggests deliberate demolition. Most bridges have a few structures at each end, including parking areas for vehicles and loading bays in some cases. Paved areas will be mostly free from vegetation, although cracks have been made here and there, and intact vehicles can be found. None will be in working condition due to long idleness but parts will

be salvageable. Vehicles are all TL10 and of a wheeled type. There were some grav vehicles but those that survived were used to escape, at least temporarily, when the city fell.

The Starport

The starport was always basic, with only a small terminal building. Draytsirv did not receive commercial traffic or passenger flights and resources mined offworld were typically delivered straight to small landing pads at the industrial complexes. There were starship-construction cradles and associated buildings but these were literally torn apart by heavy lifter ambulators searching for jump drives or components. Those buildings now form an irregular pile of rubble, largely overgrown, with a building-cradle for a 300 ton ship standing mostly intact above them. The half-built craft has fallen out of the cradle and lies on its side at the base with creepers growing into rents in the hull.

There are two 300-ton craft at the port. They are not in a good state, having been left standing in the open air for two decades, but could be brought back into service in the construction/repair decks aboard *Deepnight Revelation*. Segments of other craft also remain but these have been ransacked for parts. The Travellers might notice that the craft on the edges of the landing field, where they can come into contact with vegetation, have been attacked but those well away from such

contact appear to have been completely overlooked. This might give a useful insight into how the Biologicals' senses work.

The City

It is obvious immediately that the city has been badly damaged by combat and that the Biologicals have forced plant growth in some areas. This has split walls, toppled bridges and weakened many structures. It is equally apparent that this is no wondrous city of the Ancients. It is a TL10 city built with familiar methods by a society that primarily used light railways for public transport and wheeled vehicles for most other tasks. Buildings are widely spaced, with parks and open areas in between. These are now rampantly overgrown and largely impassable and entering such an area risks ambush by fixed or mobile Biologicals.

The Travellers will witness evidence of a long rearguard action. The Droyne of Draytsirv improvised combat vehicles out of trucks and even mounted weapons on monorail carriages. They cleared areas or deliberately toppled buildings to close off areas of the city and clearly held out for a period of weeks or months. From a high location it is possible to trace a series of concentric defensive lines gradually falling inward towards the docks region.

In some areas, nothing grows. Testing these indicates some kind of poison was used, possibly derived from industrial waste chemicals. The affected areas are mostly quite small, a few tens of metres across, but there are a couple of wide swathes over a kilometre in length running directly underneath passenger monorail lines. The Travellers may even find the wreck of a monorail train used to distribute the chemicals.

There is a lot of useful salvage in the city, although anything readily useful was taken as the Droyne retreated. What is not in evidence are bodies. These were taken away by the Biologicals either to study or for fertiliser. Mass graves (of a sort) can be found under some of the most heavily overgrown areas if the Travellers are willing to fight for the chance to take a look. The Droyne themselves developed a practice of cremating their fallen, if only to prevent the indignity of being used to feed the encroaching Biologicals' war effort. It is apparent that the Droyne made their last stand in a small area close to the sea docks. The defences of this last bastion were constructed and strengthened for months but were ultimately breached. An impressive wall was built around the whole area using the same lightweight concrete foam as most other buildings. It is a familiar material to the Travellers and they will comprehend the force required to drive roots under it and force sections up until they break.

It is clear the Droyne went down fighting. Large sections of the walls are scarred by fire or stained where toxic chemicals were poured down the front, creating a dead zone in front of that section. Fallen sections were filled in with rubble and when the walls finally failed the survivors retreated to nearby buildings to make their end. The strongest buildings were industrial or built to handle shipments of materials and food from the docks. These are now collapsed into rubble but each one tells a story. Some are simply breached and collapsed. Some have burned or been blown up. The last of the Droyne gathered in an improvised fort and held out for three days before the defences fell. Even then they were defiant; they blew the place up around them and denied the enemy victory. The Travellers will not be able to determine this from the wreckage but there are those who lived to tell of their comrades' last act of defiance.

If the Travellers look carefully enough they may realise there are burned areas and fresh chips out of buildings, suggesting more recent combat. This was on a small scale but clearly someone has been fighting in the rubble. Could there be survivors somewhere in the city? There are but they no longer live there.

THE SURVIVORS

Some of the Droyne did manage to escape during the defence. Agricultural submarines carried groups of refugees to distant areas where they hoped to hide from the Biologicals. This represented acceptance that their civilisation was gone and that they would scrape a living at best with the tools they had. Perhaps a ship might come from the Far Side of Nowhere; if some of them survived long enough they might be rescued. The bravest returned time and again to the fallen cities to seek survivors and scavenge for whatever they could find. In the early days a few holdouts were located but it has been many years since the last of them were rescued.

The scattered Droyne groups kept in contact by radio, realising the Biologicals would be unlikely to detect the transmissions and almost certainly unable to realise they could hunt down survivors that way. But hunt they did; one-by-one the survivor groups went off the air until only one remained. Hidden in a fjord surrounded by cold and inhospitable terrain, a few dozen Droyne have built a fishing village and made a life for themselves. Their remaining submarine still returns to the city, not in the hope of finding anyone alive but to find useful salvage.

The scavengers are in the city when the Travellers arrive. They are adept at avoiding detection and can often carry out a mission without any response at all. On this occasion they have found the Biologicals more active than usual and as they observe from their hiding places

they realise why. The Travellers have been detected and the Biologicals are making their usual response. The Travellers will probably not understand how much danger they are in at this point and the survivors have a difficult choice to make. They could abandon the Travellers to their fate and use them as a decoy to assist their own escape or they could make contact and perhaps bring about the salvation of their entire people – assuming they survive.

Their decision made, the Droyne show themselves, calling in low voices – using the Droyne language of Oynprith – to the Travellers. Their urgent gestures say the same thing – keep still, stay quiet. The Droyne begin to approach, moving carefully and avoiding contact with the vegetation. There are eight of them, some with healed burns and other scars from a lifetime of combat. The reason for the burns is obvious; in addition to blades and TL10 assault rifles the Droyne are armed with improvised incendiary grenades. Two of them carry home-made flamethrowers.

The leader of the Droyne is Eskuskroy, a member of the leader caste. He acts as spokesman for the group, as is only correct, and will be offended if the Travellers try to talk to his followers instead. The followers themselves will be confused and unlikely to do more than refer the Travellers back to their leader. A brief exchange of quiet words conveys the following:

- The Droyne used to live in this city.
- The city was overrun about 20 years ago.
- Some survivors remain alive and hidden.
- Eskuskroy and his followers are scavenging for supplies and equipment.
- They have a submarine at the docks.
- The city is extremely dangerous at any time and the Travellers have stirred up a response.
- Everyone needs to leave, quickly, before they are trapped and killed.

In return, Eskuskroy wants to know:

- Where are the Travellers from?
- Do they have a starship?
- Is this a rescue mission or exploration?

There is no time for a long discussion and Eskuskroy will not hold one. He recommends the Travellers accompany him to a safe place his people have used in the past. If they accept, Eskuskroy leads the way to a former industrial site with an intact upper floor. It has paving around it and no connection to the vegetation poking through some parts of the pavement. Once secure, and with his followers posted as lookouts, Eskuskroy will

share a little more information about what happened to his people. His account of what happened is from a personal perspective but as a leader he saw enough of the ‘big picture’ to infer some of what he did not witness. Eskuskroy blames the foolishness of those who came on the last ship. They talked the city’s leaders into a glorious rebellion that would free their people... but in the end it was only the freedom to die.

Eskuskroy is reluctant to reveal the location of the remaining survivors, saying only that they are far away, in a region the Biologicals do not visit. His submarine is a converted agricultural produce freighter, currently waiting at the docks. He vaguely alludes to dangerous things in the sea but does not expand further before the lookouts signal that danger is approaching. A quick glance outside shows large numbers of ambulators filtering in through the gaps in the defences. There are dozens of them already inside, moving slowly across the paved area in what resembles a picket line. If the Travellers do not realise it their allies will point out that the Biologicals are not aware of what is in the paved area. It is like a dark cave to them, so they are sweeping it in such a way that their limited senses cannot miss anyone hiding there. This is bad; it means a major response has been triggered.

How major the response is will be brought home to the Travellers by an urgent call from *Deepnight Revelation*. Orbital reconnaissance shows huge numbers of ambulators moving towards the Travellers’ position, including heavy lifters equipped with vehicle-scale weapons. There is more; some of the biggest clumps of vegetation are stirring and from them – in nightmarish slow motion – come huge ambulators the size of small starships. These drag themselves out of the ground and begin moving towards the Travellers’ position.

ESCAPING THE CITY

Landing a ship or small craft near the Travellers is impossible. Areas not already crawling with ambulators are blocked by rubble and the jagged stubs of buildings. Roofs are a possibility but finding a structure sound enough to support a craft would be a matter of blind luck – and failure means crashing into a very hostile situation. There is an alternative, suggested by Eskuskroy. His people have an escape route, readied for a time of utmost danger. Reaching it will be dangerous but staying still means being found sooner or later. If the Travellers press Eskuskroy he will tell them his people have prepared a monorail train and maintained it every time they came to the city. If should still work. He will not volunteer this information however, since he is not used to dealing with people who do not know everything his followers do after 20 years of missions to the city.

Reaching the monorail terminal can be partially accomplished by stealth but once the Travellers are detected they will find themselves in a running fight with an increasing number of ambulators. They are not tactically aware and not deliberately encircling the Travellers. However, there are a lot of them making it necessary to find gaps in the encirclement rather than just bulling through.

Orbital fire support is an option but not a solution. The particle accelerator and fusion guns aboard *Deepnight Revelation* will not penetrate the atmosphere and lasers are somewhat attenuated. Area targets can be pounded but orbital fire cannot save the Travellers without flattening the whole city and killing them alongside their enemies. This might be better than some alternatives but is hardly a viable solution. However, *Deepnight Revelation* can facilitate the escape by blasting a path clear for the Travellers to rush althrough, and directing them around major concentrations of ambulators.

The retreat to the monorail terminus should be a dramatic running battle, with Droyne hurling incendiary grenades or using flamethrowers before resorting to their blades. They are desperate but calm and fatalistic; some may go down but the others will keep fighting until they are overwhelmed. Finally the Travellers reach the terminus... and get a surprise.

The Droyne did not merely maintain a monorail train; they created their own miniature armoured train. It has an automatic cannon on a swivel mount at the front and a pintle-mounted flame projector on a platform at the rear, with the operator forced to balance precariously on a set of fuel tanks. Running boards down the sides allow riflemen to shoot sideways and down, and the whole thing has been reinforced with metal plates and hooked blades designed to cut any snagging vines.

The whole contraption looks as dangerous to the users as everyone else but is in working order. The Droyne board and take up firing positions and a technician operates the controls. Under Eskuskroy's direction the train lurches then halts; the terminus emergency braking system has failed. Without hesitation Eskuskroy orders a technician to go and release it and a warrior to defend him whilst he does. This is a suicide mission of course; an armed party might make it but two will not. Eskuskroy has made his choice – sacrifice the two for the group – and they obey with as little hesitation as their leader.

The Travellers may come from a culture where a leader might go himself rather than order others to their deaths or at least may have been raised on those kind of stories. The Droyne are different. In their culture the

leader who sends subordinates and preserves himself to continue providing leadership is the hero and the doomed followers are honoured for behaving correctly to the very end, so Eskuskroy will be very surprised if the Travellers object and offer to go instead or accompany the two in their task.

If the Travellers do nothing the warrior manages to keep the ambulators off the technician just long enough. The train is released from the holding brake and begins to accelerate alongside the platform as the two are overwhelmed. If the Travellers intervene, things get a bit more complex. The monorail train has power from its own internal batteries, kept partially charged by a solar panel system the Droyne improvised some years ago. The emergency brake system is designed to fail-safe. In other words, once power is cut the brakes are applied. A power line from the train was rigged to prevent this but sometime since the last maintenance visit the line has become detached.

The brake will have to be manually released, which means dodging around ambulators and forcing the device open with some implement. The braking device is located above the platform, at the entrance to the station. It can be reached only by a narrow gantry that projects out above the station. If the entry point is blocked by ambulators – which it inevitably will be – the only option will be a running jump onto the train as it passes.

Releasing the brake requires a successful Very Difficult (12+) STR check. The difficulty drops to Difficult (10+) if a suitable small implement (such as a knife) is used as a lever and Average (8+) if the Travellers happen to have a crowbar or something similar. The jammed mechanism could also be smashed, blown up or melted if the Travellers think of it but a flamethrower or homemade incendiary grenade will not melt steel.

While the Travellers are wrestling with the mechanism they will be attacked by typical ambulators, which have no idea what they are doing (of course) but are intent on killing them to the exclusion of all else. An ambulator that has grasped a Traveller will not deliberately fall from the platform but they are not agile creatures and might well topple. It is over 10 metres to the ground below, which is seething with ambulators. The best hope for such a Traveller is for someone to grab them so they can be hauled up. This might prove a problem with an ambulator hanging from the Traveller but perhaps someone on the train could grab the Traveller as it passes and swing them aboard – with or without their opponent. There are many ways this scene could play out, so if the Travellers come up with something dramatic and clever, the Referee should run with it



rather than just killing off someone who got unlucky. Those who try to bull through on skill checks are fair game, as usual.

Eskuskroy's Glory Ride

As the armoured monorail train starts to move, a new threat manifests itself. Among the ambulators and heavy lifters is what can only be described as a "Big One" (see page 95). It is huge and slow-moving, dragging itself along with innumerable creepers whilst its longer appendages reach out towards the monorail line. Its body is a series of woody nodules connected by creepers and roots that still shed soil as it moves. This colossus is what breached the walls and toppled the encircling buildings, so is quite capable of snapping the monorail line.

The train, overloaded with weapons and armour, cannot move quickly. It is already draining its battery at an alarming rate. If the Travellers become stuck they will be overwhelmed; the same will happen if the Big One breaks the line ahead of them. It will not deliberately do that – it will simply not think of it – but it could blunder into the track or a support and knock it down.

The Travellers can approach this problem in many ways and whilst they do so will still have to deal with a mob of ambulators and heavy lifters beneath the train. Smaller ambulators will climb clumsily on top of heavy lifters to reach the train and will have to be dislodged.

The larger ambulators may get hold of the train and start shaking it about, posing an additional problem. The Referee might impose additional difficulties as well. The flame projector might malfunction and cause a fire or the autocannon may jam. Comrades being dragged out of the train will need immediate assistance, perhaps distracting from tasks intended to save everyone. Note that Eskuskroy may order his people to abandon someone if there is a more important (to his way of thinking) task to be accomplished.

Orbital Assistance: Calling in orbital fire or close support from low-flying spacecraft is an option. It is rather indiscriminate however, so it will not be possible to shoot the horde away from the train. The Big One (and any others that approach; there are several in the city) might be targeted and will burn merrily if hit by laser fire. The Referee should not allow this to automatically succeed, however. A Traveller will need to act as a forward observer, correcting the fire of the ship's lasers. Given that they will be doing this aboard a moving train under heavy attack, it will be no easy task.

An Average (8+) Gunner (ortillery) check is required to produce a single hit, with DM-2 or perhaps more given all the distractions going on around the Traveller. The attenuated lasers do 2D damage rather than the usual 4D but this is on the starship scale so it is multiplied by 10. This is enough to annihilate a heavy lifter but the Big Ones may require more than one shot to eliminate.

Increase the Speed of the Train: This requires more power than the rather feeble battery can provide. Indeed, it is already overheating and becoming drained with the effort of propelling the train at its current modest speed. If the Travellers have some other power sources such as laser weapon powerpacks, these could be jury-rigged into the train's motive system to provide a burst of speed. Rigging such a power source into the system requires an Average (8+) Electronics check. Doing it in such a way that it does not overload the existing power supply and cause a fire requires Effect 3+. The Travellers may not realise this before using the new power source.

Keep the Train Moving: In addition to anything else, the Travellers need to keep the train moving. Some of the ambulators have dragged themselves up the support pylons and will become entangled in the motive mechanism, slowing or perhaps stopping the train and putting yet more strain on the battery. The first time this happens it will come as a surprise, jamming the mechanism and forcing the Travellers to take action. This means climbing onto the top of the train and cutting away resilient plant fibres whilst the parts of the ambulator that are not mangled beyond recognition try to fight the Travellers. This mildly horrifying task might have to be repeated at intervals, although the Travellers may learn to look for ambulators on the line and dislodge them somehow. Shooting them from a swaying, jerking monorail car is going to be tricky, whilst a more direct approach requires running along the rail and dislodging the ambulator whilst not falling off.

Distraction: If the Travellers think about it, they may realise the ambulators are closing in on signals sent by others of their kind and on vibrations through the support columns. Vibrations elsewhere might draw some of them off. These could be created by various means; grenades thrown behind the train will attract some of the local horde for a short time but a more distant distraction would increase effectiveness. Orbital fire could provide such a distraction, perhaps by dropping a large building in an area well away from the Travellers. A distraction of this sort will not draw off all the ambulators but it will thin them out.

Reaching the Docks

If the Travellers can keep the train moving and prevent a Big One from demolishing the line ahead of them they will eventually cross an area of rubble and improvised fortifications that marks the outer edge of the docks area. This is paved and has many walls making access difficult for the Biologicals, although they will smash their way in eventually. There may be a few ambulators wandering around inside already.

In the docks is a surfaced submarine, clearly heavily modified. It has a platform outside the pressure hull mounting deck guns and homemade torpedo launchers, which will affect its underwater speed but provide a measure of defence against hazards encountered at sea. As the monorail train lurches into sight the crew can be seen rushing to man the guns. If the Travellers are war-weary at this point the Referee might let them reach the boat unhindered but a last dash covered by the submarine's guns has a certain dramatic appeal.

The Travellers might not want to get on the submarine. Eskuskroy expects they will go aboard and accompany him to his home village – a journey of some two weeks at cruising speed. If the Travellers are not keen on this, an alternative might be for them to travel on the surface to an area well clear of the city, where the Travellers can be picked up by one of their craft. If the Travellers want to do this, Eskuskroy asks them to go to his village and meet the leaders there. He will have to remain with his crew – they are lost without their leader – but he can radio ahead to explain the situation and will make best speed to his home village.

THE BIOLOGICALS' RESPONSE

The Travellers can encounter Biologicals at any point during their exploration. This is likely to be clumps of vines that may or may not have spitter pods or the occasional ambulator. The Biologicals might simply ignore the Travellers at first but once they have killed more than a couple of ambulators or done significant damage to a cluster of vines a response will begin. This will be piecemeal, with isolated ambulators moving towards the Travellers' last known position.

If they are in contact with vegetation the Biologicals will know where the Travellers are but in a clear area or within a building that has not been penetrated, the Biologicals will lose track of them. Sometimes they will be able to predict movement, and even set up an ambush, but most of the time the Biologicals will simply move towards the Travellers' last known position. It is thus possible to bypass a group of ambulators by using cleared areas to effectively become invisible. Whereas a human pursuer would be likely to spot the obvious ruse, Biologicals do not think the same way and may ambulate right past a group of Travellers hiding in the only intact structure for hundreds of metres. The Droyne survivors know this trick and can easily outsmart the ambulators hunting them unless there are so many that contact becomes inevitable or the fugitives become cornered.

The initial piecemeal response will gradually escalate, with groups of ambulators moving into the city to search for the intruders. Their intent is to eliminate any fleshy beings encountered and secure any craft or vehicles. This is not a goal that can be modified; the Biologicals adopted this policy as a result of years of conflict and the continued activities of the survivors. Eventually, heavy-lifter ambulators geared for combat will be sent against the Travellers, smashing obstructions like walls to follow the Travellers and relentlessly pursuing them until killed or evaded. The latter can only happen once all contact with the local vegetation is broken, which is difficult to achieve at ground level.

Moving through upper stories or along high-level roadways will conceal the Travellers even if they are within line of sight of ambulators or clusters of vegetation. The Biologicals do not rely on sight and have rudimentary sight organs at best. Movement, vibrations and thermal emissions detected at close range suffice for most of their purposes – a plant rarely needs to worry about something 100 metres away, after all – so the Travellers can tread softly in plain sight, as it were, and still avoid detection. However, vibrations will travel through structures and loud noises will cause vibrations that attract attention, so the Travellers need to learn to think in terms of their enemies' senses rather than their own if they want to break contact or avoid detection.

ESKUSKROY AND THE SEA MONSTERS

Whether the Travellers are aboard the submarine or not, it will get into trouble on the voyage home. The Droyne do not submerge very often, as there is really no need other than to avoid bad weather. However, even with the extra drag caused by the guns, the submarine can make better time underwater. Keen to reach his home village, Eskuskroy orders a high cruising speed, which creates a great deal of turbulence in the water. This is a serious mistake; previously the Biologicals could not track the surfaced boat but now they are attracted.

There are few Biologicals in the sea; they dislike salty conditions and on a planet where the soil and water contain trace elements mildly harmful to them, the oceans are not welcoming at all. However, they grew great sea-going ambulator bodies to allow them to cross the waters and these still exist. Some have anchored themselves and become colonies of Biologicals along the shoreline. Others wander around the oceans or cruise near the islands for lack of any more focused direction.

One of these 'sea-monster' Biologicals is attracted to the submarine's underwater wake and begins following it. Eskuskroy at first tries to escape at full speed, hoping the creature will fall far behind and lose the trail. However, whilst it can be outrun the creature is able to follow the turbulence created. Risking active sonar, Eskuskroy determines that other sea-monsters have been attracted. He cannot risk them following his boat home to the village but the submarine itself is irreplaceable. Without it there will be no more salvage runs and his people will end their days as barbarians. Losing the submarine would be a betrayal of his people just as much as leading a monster to their home. Perhaps more so – a final battle would be preferable to a slow descent into primitivism, constantly fearful of the day the Biologicals will find them.

Eskuskroy can think of two options but has no way to tell which offers the best chance. One plan is to surface, reduce turbulence to a minimum and try to sneak away, perhaps under the cover of bad weather that will create distracting sub-surface ripples. This is almost the exact opposite of a submarine diving deep and creeping away from an enemy vessel but works the same way. The problem is that there is no way to know if it has worked. Active sonar will tell the Droyne if there is a Biological in the area but will give away their position. Without knowing he has given his enemy the slip, Eskuskroy cannot afford to go home.

The alternative is to fight. The crew have fought a sea-monster before and barely survived. It took time and resources they could not spare to repair the boat afterwards and lives were lost. Yet Eskuskroy feels he has no alternative. Only by destroying his enemy can he be sure he will not lead it to his home. Ultimately, he cannot take that risk so unless the Travellers offer a viable alternative (in person or over the radio) he will resolve to face the beast and kill it or die trying.

If it comes to battle, Eskuskroy will try to fight in shallow water where the sea-monster cannot evade his guns by diving under. It can only stay under for a short time in any case due to the natural buoyancy of its body but he does not want to risk it getting under the submarine. It will be a strange battle, matching home-made torpedoes and deck guns against a giant mass of plant matter. Unaided, the odds are not good. However, the Travellers can help. As on land, orbital fire will be effective against a large target such as the sea-monster. Even attenuated and firing at wet plant matter, *Deepnight Revelation's* lasers can set the monster afire, which will destroy most of it. It might also be possible to

create a toxic compound from waste material aboard the submarine and release it into the water, or the Travellers might find some other way to even the odds. If not, Eskuskroy's submarine will more than likely be crippled in the fight. He and his crew might be able to abandon ship by stepping from the conning tower into the airlock of a spacecraft. They face a slow death at sea or a quick one by drowning, otherwise.

The Travellers could help the submarine slip away instead. They can track the sea-monsters from orbit easily enough and might even be able to experiment a little by seeing what level of wave the creatures can detect at what distance and in what sea state; the Travellers could build a mathematical model that will predict how fast the submarine can go and still evade detection. There are currently three sea-monsters in the area, all of which are aware of the submarine and heading for it. The Travellers could guide the boat between them and advise when they have lost contact. By heading in a random direction for a while after the sea-monsters' behaviour returns to normal the submarine can eventually proceed homeward knowing it is not being followed. Some kind of 'noisemaker' device dropped into the water will also distract one or more of the creatures and may cause the others to lose track of the less noisy boat.

ESKUSKROY'S VILLAGE

At some point the Travellers will need to discuss the future of Eskuskroy's village with him and/or its leaders. When the Droyne learn the Travellers are not from the Dual Alliance their reactions are mixed – they did not want to return to a society their ancestors left but saw no alternative. There are too few of them to create a colony on another world, so they have a choice between staying on Draytsirv until the Biologicals find them or leaving with the Travellers.

The decision is an all-or-none one, made by the leaders of the village with no apparent input from the others. Eskuskroy or another leader will simply announce to the Travellers 'It is decided. We will go with you', even if there has been no discussion of any such thing. If the Travellers agree, the Droyne will accept suitable conditions but expect to remain as a community aboard *Deepnight Revelation*. Their leaders will speak for them, and maintain order, and the community as a whole will make itself useful.

The exodus, if the Travellers agree to it, involves an orderly tearing-down of every useful thing in the village. The Droyne naturally intend to bring their belongings, flamethrowers and all, aboard *Deepnight Revelation*. Eskuskroy will bring his submarine if he possibly can or at least the most useful parts of it. This exodus will cause the Travellers some problems but they will gain the services of 58 Droyne of all castes, who obey their leaders without question. Those leaders will obey the commanding officers of the expedition in the same manner so long as they are treated fairly.

The adventure on Draytsirv may therefore gain the Travellers some new crewmembers – some of whom may become prominent characters in the rest of the voyage or even be played as Travellers. The Droyne can be considered a detachment of the crew with no shipboard skills whatsoever but a solid grounding in 'planetside' survival. All but the youngest grew up in a TL10 society and remember how to use devices – converting to those intended for humans is not much of a problem. They can also learn basic shipboard skills over time. However, their real value is as scroungers and scrappers. These people spent 20 years breaking down whatever random bits and pieces Eskuskroy was able to bring them and turning those into something useful.

WHAT THE DROYNE KNOW

The people of the Dual Alliance knew of the Ancients but they are not aware that the Ancients were Droyne. If the Travellers discover traces of Oyskrusk's expedition with Eskuskroy's Droyne aboard, questions will be asked. The Travellers may have to reveal the history of their ancestors to their new friends.

These Droyne are not psionic. The Travellers probably have no way to know whether they lost the potential or the ability to obtain training, or both. However, if the Droyne of Draytsirv encounter carvings like the ones in the *Deepnight Legacy* adventure they will all be able to perceive the meaning in a clearer manner than a sensitive human would. This alone will make them a huge asset.

BIOLOGY EXPERIMENT

This adventure can take place before or after the visit to Draytsirv. It represents an opportunity to learn more about the Biologicals and how they came to be, with the possibility of benefiting from Oyskrusk's work on a counteragent against the Deepnight Entity. It is possible that the Travellers may decide the Biologicals are a threat to other species and attempt to wipe them out. They could extinguish all life on Zeta 2 with asteroid bombardment if they so choose but ultimately it would make little difference. The Biologicals are decentralised and can return from the brink of extinction if just a handful of bioships or braincases survive on some remote world. Their expansion would be inhibited by the loss of Zeta 2, however, since this is one of the few places bioships have been created.

If there are Droyne from Draytsirv aboard they will want to send a small party with the Travellers to learn more about the creatures that wiped out their homeworld. This might be a mixed blessing, since the Droyne are unlikely to have familiarised themselves with the Travellers' equipment and operating procedures by the time they reach Zeta 2. However, the Droyne are disciplined and will obey their own leader, so as long as the Travellers can convey to Eskuskroy what they need his people to do, they should be reliable. They will not attempt to take revenge on the Biologicals – they would not even consider such a pointless gesture. This does not mean they will follow the Travellers' directions precisely, however; they are the followers of Eskuskroy, not the Travellers.

ZETA 2

As the Travellers approach Zeta 2 their initial sensor sweep indicates a life-bearing planet with a tainted atmosphere. This is due to high levels of volcanism in many areas. Zeta 2 is the sort of world that would attract initial interest then be placed far down the list of potential colonies due to difficult local conditions. The planet's molten core is highly active, causing its tectonic plates to move far more quickly than the norm. This has created multiple 'rings of fire' with many volcanoes and a number of severe earthquake zones. Earthquakes are not that much of a problem to a species that does not build anything and whilst

enclaves of Biologicals are sometimes wiped out by a sudden eruption the fertile soil caused by frequent ash deposits allows rapid regrowth.

Zeta 2 is about 83% covered in water, with most of the land concentrated as several small continents grouped closely together. These are the remains of a supercontinent that broke up several million years ago and are drifting apart. The seas in between these continents are shallow, with many volcanic islands, whilst the rest of the oceans are much deeper. Most of the available land is covered in vegetation related to the plant species that eventually produced the Biologicals. There are no large animals, although insects, worms and the like do exist.

The Biologicals have spread over all of the continents, and there are small numbers living in the shallow seas. In the 300,000 years or so since Oyskrusk's expedition modified the Biologicals, the much more limited original version has been almost entirely supplanted. There are some enclaves of proto-Biologicals in some areas but unless protected by accidents of geography these tend to be taken over by the much more adaptable modified species.

The Travellers will be able to detect what appear to be bioships moving around close to the planetary surface and occasionally higher in the atmosphere. Most are in the 500–2,000 displacement tons range but a few are larger. It is possible that there may also be true bioships in-system. If so, some will be cruising the inner system whilst others may be rooted into the ground, either growing or 'repairing' themselves. A rooted bioship can take anything from hours to weeks to free itself, depending on how extensive its root system has become.

The Travellers will also be able to detect a single conventional power source. It is co-located with a metallic structure that might at first be mistaken for a starship. Power signature is very low and similar to the monument discovered during *The Crossing*. The structure is not so tall however and broader at the base. Remote scanning cannot determine its composition but suggests a complex metallic alloy similar to that used by the Ancients for their ships and installations. The structure rests in a shallow bowl-shaped depression,



with a zone of dead or dying vegetation extending several hundred metres around it. Absolutely nothing grows within about 20 metres of the structure and the vegetation looks unhealthy for over a kilometre outside the dead zone.

THE STRUCTURE

The structure is constructed in one of the most tectonically stable areas of the whole planet. It takes the form of a dome some 216 metres in diameter, with a spire atop it and resting on a perfectly circular base, which extends out an additional 27 metres from the dome. It is not initially obvious but this base is in fact a short cylinder nine metres high, forming a lower level. Originally the bottom four metres or so of this cylinder was buried in the soil, with metal piles extending much deeper to provide stability and anchoring. Today the surrounding soil is about one metre from the top of the cylinder. Soil deposition in the surrounding area would have been much greater but for the fact that the material used to construct the structure is toxic to local plant life. This has created the dead zone, which in turn accounts for the bowl-shaped depression surrounding the structure. In another few thousand years the soil level will reach the top of the cylinder and begin to bury it but the process is very slow.

Scanning the structure is difficult. It reads as an entirely solid object but in fact has large hollow areas where Oyskrusk and his team lived and worked. The outer skin, walls of chambers and main structural members are solid, whilst in between them is a low-density version of the same alloy. There are two levels within the cylinder and one in the dome. The rest of the structure is indeed solid, albeit of low density.

From a distance the base appears completely free from vegetation and surrounded by a wide dead zone. Closer inspection reveals a different picture; there are some Biologicals growing in the dead zone but they are weak and sickly. Tendrils and creepers have been extended onto the cylinder from all sides but seem to wither and die soon after contact. Here and there a thick creeper has been grown, then dropped onto the surface. These survive for longer but eventually meet the same fate. The Biologicals' plant matter decays far more quickly than it normally would when in contact with the surface and seems to be somehow cleansed by the shiny silver-white metal of the Ancients' alloy. The whole external structure is made from this material, which is cool, smooth and slightly odd to the touch. It feels as if it should be slippery – which can be alarming when standing on a curved surface at a height – but affords a good grip even when wet.

The dome is 216 metres in diameter and rises some 54 metres in height. A narrowing spire projects another 108 metres above this. Atop the spire is a disc or plate 27 metres in diameter, with a gently bowled top. This contains rounded structures that look like they might house antennae or similar devices. This is, in fact, their function, but the Travellers will be unable to get into one to find out.

There is an entry point into the main structure atop the spire, in the form of a hatch that opens automatically for any non-plant-based creature larger than a human child. It reveals a shaft dropping down to the main level, smooth on the sides and bearing no signs of a ladder or similar device. This is a gravitic lift shaft. Someone stepping in at the top will drop quickly to the bottom, slowing to land gently. Once the shaft is clear, entering it at the bottom has the reverse effect. There is an automated door at the bottom, which opens when someone arrives there and closes behind them after they enter. The hatch at the top mirrors this function; both are never open at the same time.

There is also an entry point at ground level. It is an automated door in the side of the dome, almost completely undetectable until approached, at which point it slides silently open. There are no manual controls for this door, which is large enough to admit two human-sized people walking side-by-side. The door is triggered by the approach of a person in the same manner as others throughout the complex. The edge of the cylinder has a walkway running all the way around it, with extendable ramps situated at 120-degree intervals. These, like the doors, extend automatically when someone approaches.

The following notes apply throughout the Ancients' complex.

GENERAL APPEARANCE AND AMBIENCE

The whole structure is constructed from the same smooth silvery-white alloy, decorated with swirling patterns that may seem vaguely familiar to the Travellers. Most of these are decorative and do not trigger images in the minds of sensitives or Droyne. The carvings of the Memorial Hall are an exception. All areas are dimly lit, brightening to a comfortable level when someone enters.

The complex was built and equipped from Oyskrusk's ship, using equipment brought down from orbit. Anything made on-planet was designed to be taken back to the ship and the Droyne were diligent in reclaiming everything when they left, so what they left behind was the shell and basic machinery of their installation. Others coming after them would find a ready-made base

capable of supporting their survival needs but Oyskrusk could not afford to leave behind anything that might be useful on his own voyage.

The devices that provided light, clean air and water, food and waste removal were built into the structure of the installation and thus remain. Everything else is gone. The Travellers will not be able to pillage the complex for artefacts or carry off the key systems. Even chipping bits off the structure is difficult in the extreme. There are rewards to be gained here but stripping the place is simply not an option.

STRUCTURE AND POWER DISTRIBUTION

The alloy from which the structure and its fittings are made is extremely difficult to cut or burn; without the right tools (which the Travellers do not have) it resists all attempts to cut into it unless sufficient power is used to incinerate the surrounding cubic metre or so. Travellers applying heat or energy, such as a laser or fusion cutter, may be able to detect a tiny increase in the temperature of the whole structure; energy is dissipated throughout it almost instantly. The alloy also has the same gravitational hysteresis capabilities as the monument encountered earlier, using the planet's gravitational field to meet its modest power requirements. If additional energy is required it can be drawn from the thermal energy stored within the structure itself, which is then replenished by solar heating and the natural flow of heat into a cold object.

SECURITY AND RESPONSES

Oyskrusk's expedition felt secure in their planetside fortress, to the point where their security measures were almost entirely passive. The whole structure, other than some research areas, was constructed from a material poisonous to the Biologicals. The elevated entry points made access difficult – when the complex was occupied the top of the cylinder, and thus the door into the dome level, was five metres above ground level. More importantly, ambulators did not exist back then.

The complex was thus built to keep the local plant life at bay and with no animal threats this was entirely sufficient. As a result there was little need for security. No areas are 'secured' in the sense of locked doors – every door or portal opens automatically when something large enough to be a Droyne approaches. The thermal signature of a large upright creature is sufficient to trigger a door. There was no need for anything more than this; unauthorised personnel would simply not go where they were not supposed to and plant threats were kept at bay by passive measures – a wall of toxic material and an automated 'decontamination' system at the entry point.

The decontamination system was not intended to get rid of toxic materials but to kill any plant cells not carried in sealed containers. This is accomplished by spraying a micro-fine dust of particles – the same material the base is built from – over anyone entering. The dust has a metallic smell and taste, which is actually not unpleasant and completely harmless to humans or Droyne. It will poison the local plant life however, causing any exposed Biological tissue to rapidly die.

This oddly specialised bio-security system has protected the complex for thousands of years. It has thwarted attempts by heavy lifters, Big Ones and even landships to get into the structure. Roots cannot force a way into a seamless structure and begin to die as soon as they touch its surface. Landships making contact with the spire are poisoned and often wither. Those that survive might try again and again but cannot do anything to the structure. Weapons such as spreader javelins simply bounce off and the corrosive material used by the Biologicals is entirely ineffective against the Ancients' alloy.

CONTROLS

Most of the installation's control systems were built into its structure. They were either operated automatically upon pre-set triggers or telepathically activated by a Droyne with the correct authorisation. Thus there are no buttons or switches to fiddle with in most areas and no way to prevent functions from occurring.

LIFE SUPPORT

The installation constantly draws air and water from the surroundings, purifying and storing it ready for use. The food preparation system still works, although what it produces is uninspiring to say the least. The complex recycles waste and adds it to plant material gathered outside the complex. This is dispensed as either a paste or blocks, uniform in colour but shaped in swirls and ovals resembling some of the more inventive forms of pasta.

The system has had nothing to work with but water for millennia, and can dispense only pure or mineralised water, but if it is given plant material to work with it will be able to dispense food after a few hours. Humans will find the paste or blocks weird-tasting but not entirely unpalatable and Droyne will, for the most part, rather like them. Indeed, if the Droyne from Draytsirv are present and permitted to try the food blocks they will be delighted, preferring them to almost anything *Deepnight Revelation* can produce. Whatever they are tasting (or not tasting) is not apparent to other species.

The Dome Level

The dome level is entered directly from the top of the cylinder, or through the spire shaft. The dome 'skin' is very thick; over four metres at the top where it meets the spire and 24 metres at the base. Entry at this level is through a tunnel with automated doors at each end. Travellers will note a fine dust suspended in the air as they pass through. This clings to clothing and seems to dissolve in seconds; harmless to humans and Droyne but it will rapidly kill any local plant life – which includes anything grown by Biologicals on any planet.

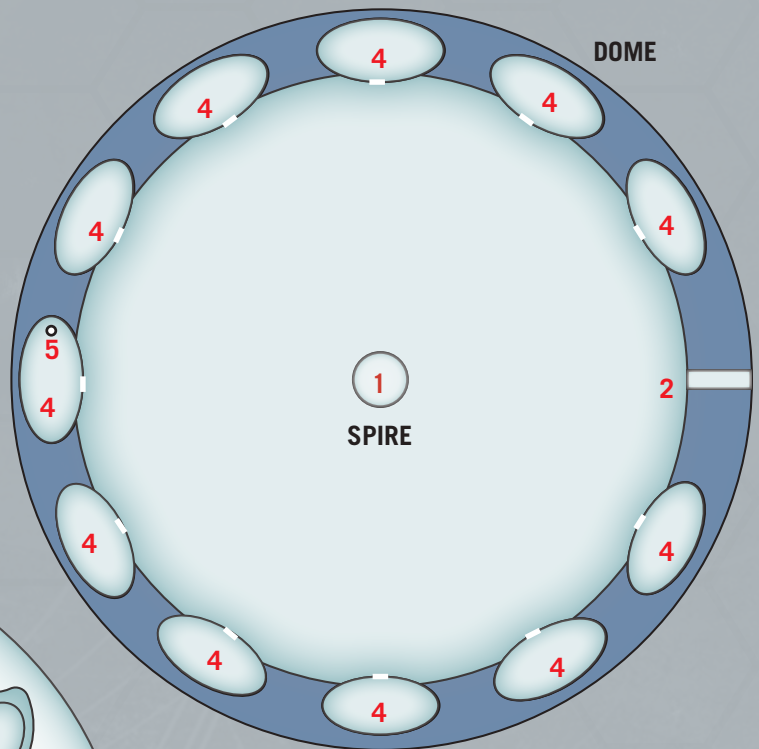
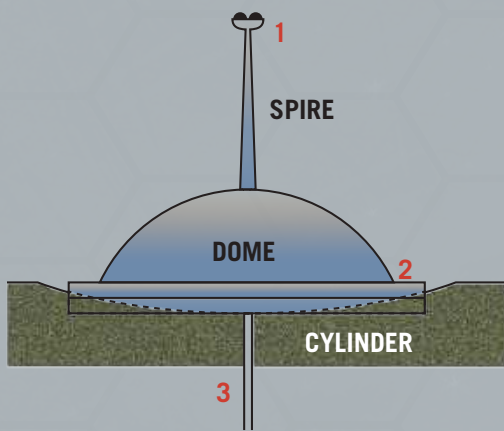
The inner doors open into a vast space dominated by the spire that penetrates the ceiling. There are no furnishings nor any kind of equipment; this chamber is nothing more or less than a monument to the greatness of Oyskrusk and his people. The Travellers may have encountered this sort of grandiose self-acclamation before. The carvings will trigger sensitives, who will gain an impression of what happened here. Droyne will see more, and with greater clarity, but will still not know every detail. See page 46 for exactly what happened at the installation and why.

There are 11 chambers set into the walls of the dome, spaced at regular intervals with the entry tunnel taking the 12th position. Each of these chambers is oval, with a domed ceiling. They are currently completely empty, although close inspection will indicate concealed attachment points for equipment or furnishings, along with waste removal systems. Most were used as living areas for the installation's personnel, fitted out with equipment brought down from Oyskrusk's ship whilst the installation was in use and returned to it later. The chamber directly opposite the entrance tunnel contains a gravitic lift similar to that running up the spire. This connects to the upper cylinder level.

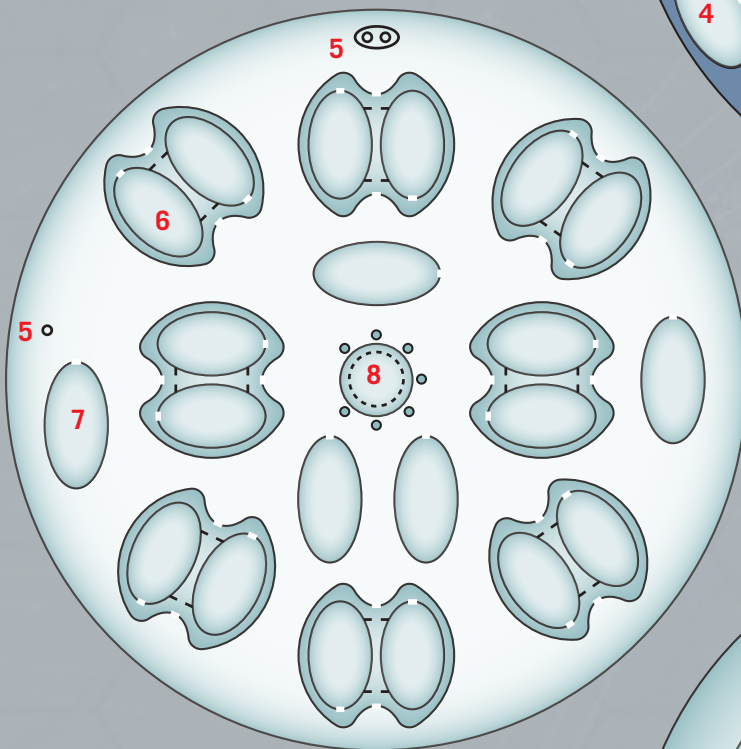
Upper Cylinder Level

The upper cylinder level is an open-plan space, with concentric rings of ovoid, domed structures fitted seamlessly into the floor. These might be described as 'work pods', each with a thin skin of the same material as the rest of the complex. Most of the pods are in pairs, with an enclosed corridor between them creating something of a maze, although not a very complex one. Single pods have a door of their own, whilst the paired pods are arranged with an 'outer' pod giving access to the inner one. Automated doors seal both ends of the connecting corridor.

Some of the pods are entirely empty but others contain benches and tables constructed as part of the chamber's structure. There is no machinery in most of them and

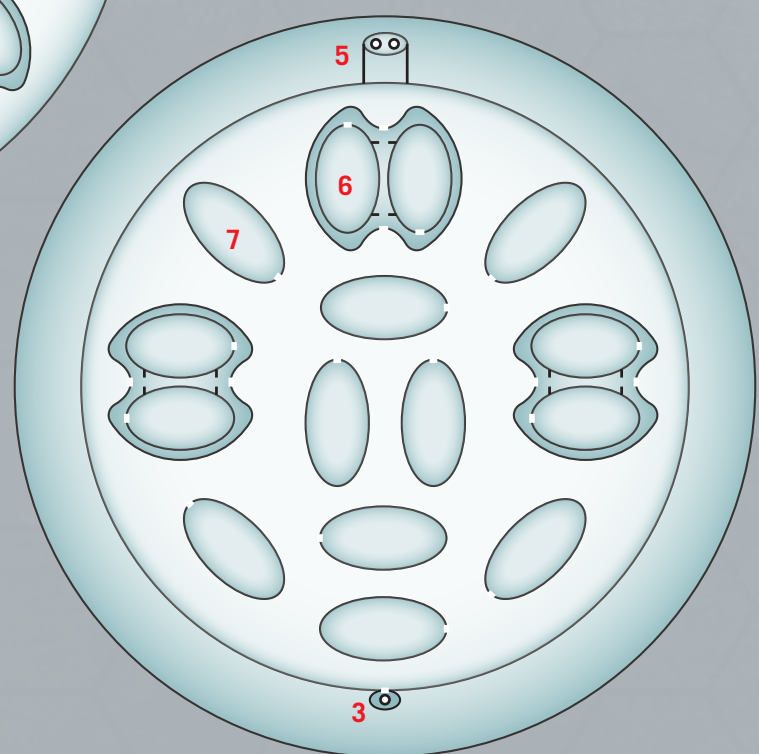


UPPER CYLINDER



THE COMPLEX

LOWER CYLINDER



LEGEND

- 1. Access to dome via spire
- 2. Side entrance
- 3. Access to caves system via gravitic lift
- 4. Chamber
- 5. Gravitic lift
- 6. Dual pods
- 7. Single pod
- 8. Raised dai with throne

they are all perfectly clean. The material from which surfaces are made slowly absorbs any non-living tissues or particles, making the whole place self-cleaning.

A few of the 'outer' pods are plumbed with overhead and side jets, with grates in the floor that open when the jets activate. This normally delivers water, perhaps with an admixture of chemicals tailored to a particular decontamination need. The water-decontamination system still works and will activate automatically if someone steps inside with dirt particles or bits of Biological stuck to their clothing. The obvious (and correct) inference is that the inner chamber was a laboratory of some kind. Other chambers appear to have had an emergency-medical function, with attachment points for grav-supported gurneys and a variety of medical equipment. This has clearly been removed, leaving just the fixture points for the Travellers to figure out.

At the centre of the level is an open space, underneath the base of the spire. Here, there is a raised dais with a central plinth, supporting what appears at first to be an abstract sculpture. Closer inspection reveals it to be the mounting frame for a revolving chair or throne. There are short pillars around it, with a rounded top and no obvious function. These once displayed holographic images of whatever the overseeing Droyne wanted to look at but without psionic attuning to the installation's command functions they cannot be controlled. The pillars are inert when the Travellers arrive but may activate automatically later.

Lower Cylinder Level

The lower cylinder level can only be accessed by way of two gravitic lifts located in a chamber 90 degrees around from the entrance tunnel and connecting to the upper cylinder level. The whole chamber is a lift, allowing large pieces of machinery to be transferred between levels. From this chamber, a short tunnel leads to a second ovoid chamber. Anyone passing along this area is dusted with the same vegetation-killing compound as used at the entrance.

From the entry chamber, the Travellers enter the main lower level. It is a cylindrical space with a floor of the same metal as most other surfaces, with more of the domed 'pods' spaced regularly in concentric circles around the chamber. Again, some are 'double' pods but most are single. All have automatic doors and appear to have been used to grow plants of some kind using artificial sunlight provided by panels in the ceiling. There is nothing left in any of them but desiccated soil but at one time they all had deep growing beds set

up for different environmental conditions. These pods are lined with a very similar composition material to the alloy in general use but one that does not poison the local plant life. The innermost ring of pods do not contain growth-beds. They are empty but for benches that once held laboratory equipment. As with everything else the expedition packed up this gear when the work was finished.

Directly opposite the entry chamber, in the outer ring of pods, is a gravitic lift chamber in a shaft that descends deep into the ground. It is over 400 metres deep, penetrating bedrock and terminating in another oval chamber deep underground. The shaft walls contain machinery for extracting water from the surrounding rock and soil, and purifying it for use in the complex. Even if the Travellers figure out the equipment is there it is nearly impossible to access. The deep chamber has a horizontal tunnel, sealed by the usual pair of automatic doors, at one end. This leads into a natural cave system.

The Caves

The caves are a naturally occurring system, although the connecting shafts have been widened or new tunnels bored to connect parts of the cave system. Strips of the same material (as the installation is built from) run as far as the first cavern, providing light and occasionally a dusting of decontamination particles. Beyond this point the caves are unlit.

The caves can be divided into an 'upper' and 'lower' level, although there are constant variances within each level. The upper level consists of several small caves, apparently formed by water action in the distant past. They are damp, with a little water trickling down the walls in places or forming stalactites. The walls show signs of cutting or chipping in the past, where researchers took rock and water samples away from their installation. A section of the cave system has collapsed at some point, probably long after the complex was abandoned.

The lower level consists of a few winding tunnels and small caves, which suddenly opens out into a large cavern. This is dominated by a pool or small lake fed by water permeating through the surrounding rocks. The pool is shallow around the edges but rapidly shelves down to a depth of 50 metres. The surface of the water is occasionally disturbed by ominous ripples. The reason for these is not immediately apparent but the most likely cause is underwater currents caused by a feeder stream or thermal activity in the water. This is not the case, however.

OYSKRUSK'S EXPERIMENT

Oyskrusk's expedition investigated planets as it went, in much the same way as *Deepnight Revelation*. At Zeta 2 they found a very interesting plant species and decided to study it. What they discovered piqued the interest of the expedition's scientists and after multiple extensions to their stay they asked permission to undertake a major project. The proto-Biologicals were promising in a number of ways and might prove to be an asset against the Deepnight Entity. To this end, a research complex was built and a project lasting nearly 25 years – or over 300,000 years, depending on the frame of reference, was undertaken.

The aim of the project was to 'uplift' the Biologicals in the same manner the Ancients had uplifted animal species on many worlds, to create the potential for mobility and render the new species resistant to infection by the Deepnight Entity. To this end the researchers implanted genes that caused the Biologicals to produce a version of the counteragent already used elsewhere and tailored the growth of the Biologicals' plant fibres towards faster movement. These endeavours did not bear fruit whilst the Droyne were on Zeta 2, although they learned a lot about an unusual area of biology in the process. By the time they moved on the experiment appeared to be a failure, although Oyskrusk hoped that others following behind his expedition might benefit from or even complete the work.

The other great experiment undertaken on Zeta 2 was the creation of a multiple-braincase enclave. Up to this point the Biologicals were isolated but by grafting multiple braincases onto the same genetically altered vine the Droyne hoped to create the capacity for a basic intellect. In this they succeeded to both a greater and lesser degree than they intended. They did not create a sentient plant-based creature in the conventional sense but did kick-start the Biologicals' move towards a form of intelligence.

The cross-linked braincases were of a primitive type but over the centuries new braincases grew on the vines planted by the researchers. These were bigger, with the capability to fulfil the functions of the multiple-braincase enclave in a single case. By the time the first ambulator pulled itself out of the ground the new, semi-sentient braincase type was dominant. The development of the Biologicals proceeded from there by way of a combination of semi-intelligent desire and natural forces. Oyskrusk and his followers were long dead by this time and no Ancients followed them to learn of what they had done.

Today, some of the original multiple-braincase enclaves still survive. They were planted many kilometres from the installation to prevent its defences poisoning them. Some have died over the centuries but others have grown considerably. In most cases a group of new braincases will be grown on a vine 'owned' by an existing braincase and will then move away in ambulators grown for them. A true braincase-network is rare. These are the repositories of the Biologicals' experiences as a species and are capable of slightly more creativity than the average single braincase.

These multiple-braincase enclaves are aware of the installation and the dead zone around it, and motivated by a mix of instinctive desire and hostility. They are not self-aware and cannot reason but there is a motivation in their makeup to grow over the installation site and possess it, and at the same time to eliminate the threat it poses. These two motivations have prompted the enclaves to endlessly send ambulators onto the site and push creepers into it. They have for the most part failed but a large root system has been driven into the caves below the installation, collapsing part of it. At the time the Travellers arrive the Biologicals are almost ready to make another attempt to penetrate the complex and the Travellers' arrival will trigger it.

EXPLORING THE COMPLEX

Approaching the complex, the Travellers will note a number of landships and a few Big Ones moving outside the dead zone that surrounds the installation. There are also large numbers of ambulators and heavy lifters but these are mostly static and under the cover of local vegetation. Landships wander around, up to 500 kilometres away but return in a restless pattern. Ground-based Biologicals remain closer. There will be no interference from the bigger Biologicals if the Travellers approach from the air but anyone trying to get through to the dead zone at ground level is likely to be attacked.

A grav vehicle or spacecraft could drop personnel off atop the spire, although this is a hazardous undertaking. Landing on the top of the cylinder is much safer, posing no real problems for a skilled pilot. Either way, the Travellers will be able to enter the main structure without undue difficulty. Moving close to the edge of the cylinder will activate the walkway and ramps leading to the ground, although the latter will only extend when someone is actually on the walkway. Travellers in this part of the installation may just be able to make out the faint outlines of covers over hoppers where vegetable matter – or even soil – can be deposited for the use of the installation's food-production machinery.

The Travellers will be able to explore the complex for a while before anything serious happens. Whichever way they enter, they will witness the grandeur of the main domed chamber. Sensitives will gain an impression of what Oyskrusk and his people did here; Droyne will see it more clearly but may not be able to convey everything. The overall impression is that Oyskrusk and his people wanted to learn about the Biologicals' unique ecosystem and perhaps figure out a way to 'harden' the ecology of a world against infestation by the Deepnight Entity. This led to the construction of the complex and a long period of experimentation that was eventually curtailed as the expedition needed to move on. Oyskrusk had hoped that perhaps an ambulatory version of the Biologicals could be sent against an infestation and, if successful, the ambulators could then be destroyed with the toxic material developed for the complex. Even if the attempt failed the ambulators might be absorbed, perhaps making the entity vulnerable to the toxin. At the time the experiment was abandoned little progress had been made.

Communications will be a problem once the Travellers enter the structure. The material it is built from not only makes remote sensor operations difficult but also interferes with the Travellers' communications devices. Contact will be lost with everyone outside (and with *Deepnight Revelation* herself) as soon as the Travellers enter the structure. The only way to contact the ship or any parties operating planetside is to go outside – either through the door at ground level or by taking the lift up to the top of the spire.

Room-to-room communication is also heavily disrupted. A Traveller who enters a work pod is not entirely cut off from his colleagues until they re-emerge but transmissions through the walls of a pod or even across a large chamber like the cylinder levels will be garbled. A successful Average (8+) Electronics (comms) check will allow a number of words equal to the Effect of the check to be received. Transmissions between floors of the complex are impossible.

The Referee should note that pairs of doors automatically close/open in sequence. Thus someone atop the spire can keep the upper hatch open whilst they communicate with *Deepnight Revelation* but they cannot relay what is being said to comrades in the dome chamber below. A possible solution is for someone at the bottom of the shaft to receive the message relayed from the top, open the door into the chamber and retransmit it to their fellow Travellers, although this does leave whoever is at the top on the far side of a closed hatch out of contact with the other Travellers. If something

happens whilst they are out of contact they will not be able to pass it on or call for help. It could get very lonely atop that spire, even if nothing is happening. Sooner or later, however, something will indeed happen.

Triggering a Reaction

How long the Travellers have to explore the complex is up to the Referee, who should keep in mind that wandering around an empty structure – no matter how wondrous – will eventually become boring. At first the Travellers will not know the interior is safe and it is quite possible for the Referee to have them jumping at shadows. Once they become complacent or if they seem to be losing interest, it is time to trigger the Biologicals' response.

The Biologicals have been trying to get into the complex and destroy it, for centuries. They are not great thinkers but have concluded that constant piecemeal attacks do not work. This did not make them desist – it is not in their nature to stop growing in a given direction if there is something there they want – but they have learned to build up for a massive onslaught. This has never worked either but the Biologicals' nature is such that they cannot stop trying. They have made some progress in the past; the cave collapse was caused by growth into the caverns and they have managed to penetrate the lower cave level too. There are roots in the caves, deep under the surface of the pool.

The first indication that something has changed comes when the pillars around the former command dais begin displaying holographic images. Most are incomprehensible patterns of lights and colours that presumably conveyed information to the builders of the complex. Others are simply images of the complex and the cave system and it is here that the Travellers' attention will be directed. An image of the cave pool is being displayed, completed with various symbols. Among them is a readout that can be interpreted; numbers in Oynprith. The numbers are changing and it is obvious why. They must be a readout of water level in the pool and it is clear that its level has started to drop. Not quickly but water is draining out of the pool somehow.

The Travellers can avoid any danger from this source by not going to investigate. If they sit tight or do something entirely different the events in the caves will play out in the hologram display and may not affect the Travellers at all. If so, the next phase of the Biologicals' response will begin after a while. This will be shown on the holograms and will be very obvious to anyone outside. Orbital observation will also note the activity on-planet but the communications disconnect caused by the structure of the installation may prevent the Travellers receiving a warning or giving any meaningful orders.



Underground Attack

The reason for the falling water level in the pool is effectively that the plug has been pulled out. Thick roots penetrated the rock and reached the pool, forcing wider cracks over the years. Now they have been pulled back, leaving behind a tangled mess of fibres and smaller creepers have replaced them. As these push up into the pool – at a rate of several metres per hour, an astonishing rate of growth – ambulators are also forcing their way through the holes. Water has been draining slowly out and the rate has increased rapidly.

If the Travellers return to the caves they will be in time to see the first ambulators emerging from the water and clawing their way up the creepers to the edge of the pool. These will attack anyone in the caves and begin advancing towards the shaft up to the main installation. At the same time, large roots similar to the spreader weapons used by bioships will begin splitting the rubble of the collapsed section and more ambulators will come through. If the Travellers do not descend into the caves they will be in no immediate danger but they may be able to see the caves filling up with ambulators and spreaders using the holographic repeaters in the command chamber.

The Travellers cannot stem the tide of ambulators coming through the caves; all they will be able to do is make a fighting retreat to the lift shaft. However, if they realise there are spreaders coming in through the rubble they may be able to slow them down for a while by some means. Incendiaries and flame weapons will destroy

the nearest spreaders and explosives will pulp them – however, cracking the nearby rock not only endangers the Travellers but ultimately helps the Biologicals.

The intent here is to undermine the complex with spreaders and crack the surrounding rocks to permit access. There is no masterplan to this; the Biologicals can attack the complex this way so that is what they are doing. Unless the Travellers come up with something very clever the caves will quickly be overrun but the closed shaft door at the bottom will be a major obstacle to the Biologicals. Its material is toxic to them but takes some time to have an effect. Thus the first ambulators to reach the doors will start to die but this will take hours or even days; more will jam up behind them and fill the tunnel. A spreader type root will eventually be pushed through this mass of plant matter and begin forcing the doors open. This attempt will begin about three hours after the pool level is noticed to be dropping and will take another three hours or so. Again, the spreader will begin to die but not fast enough to stop the base being penetrated. It will take another 48 hours for a spreader to grow up the shaft and begin attacking the door at the top. This will withstand attack for about four hours before the first ambulators will be able to gain access to the lower cylinder level.

Soon after the cave system is entered, spreaders begin vigorously attacking faults in the bedrock under the installation. Tiny vibrations can be detected by the installation's monitoring system and will be displayed on a holographic diagram of the whole complex. Within

two hours the vibrations have increased in intensity sufficiently to be considered as tremors and these continue to escalate until they can be detected by anyone touching the installation's walls or floor.

If the Travellers are still in the installation after three hours, the tremors become less frequent but more powerful, until they start to cause noticeable – but small – distortions in the structure. About 20 hours after that, the tremors start to feel like minor earthquakes. The intervals between them increase to anything from five to twenty hours and each is more powerful. The installation may begin to tilt or settle as the underlying rock is pulverised and about 60 hours after the attack begins its structure begins to fail. This is barely noticeable at first – just ominous groaning sounds and stress patterns in the walls – but within a few more days the structure will tear at key points, allowing the Biologicals access throughout the installation. It will not be induced to collapse for several more days but eventually the destruction of the bedrock beneath it will cause the installation to tilt and tear sufficient that the spire comes down and the dome collapses. Complete destruction might take centuries more but the Biologicals have time on their side.

Surface Attack

Soon after the first ambulators enter the cave system, an attack begins at surface level. This takes the form of heavy lifters and Big Ones advancing across the dead zone and attempting to climb onto the upper surface of the cylinder. The toxic effect is stronger at ground level, since this is where the Droyne thought an attack would come, but even so a large Biological will take time to die. The scene outside will be relayed by the holographic monitors as it begins to unfold.

What the Travellers witness resembles the spread of a briar patch, only much, much faster. The tide of vegetation rolls up to the edge of the cylinder then spills over it, with ambulators lurching onto the upper surface and collapsing within minutes. Those minutes are enough for others to climb over them before they too succumb. Soon the upper surface of the cylinder is covered in decaying sludge, which insulates other ambulators and the large creepers that push their way onto the piles of ambulators. It will take about an hour for the first Biologicals to reach the base of the dome and about 90 minutes for the first spreader to begin attacking it. Others will try to breach the dome but there is little to gain purchase upon.

The surface door is tougher than the one in the caves and will resist attack for seven hours. Three hours after that the attack on the inner dome door begins. It, too, resists for seven hours. Once it is breached a

small number of ambulators begin to force their way in through the choked mass of dying vegetation. They will get in slowly and begin to die as soon as they touch the metal of the installation, so it may be possible for the Travellers to hold out for some time in the dome level. The wall of vegetation outside will begin to climb up the outside of the dome but makes slow progress.

The interior of the dome level will become untenable sooner or later but well-armed or inventive Travellers can delay this for some time. More agile Travellers might simply dodge the slow-moving ambulators as they go about their business at the dome level. That business will become pressing however; if the Travellers cannot get out they will eventually be overrun or killed when the structure collapses.

Air Attack

The installation will also be attacked from the air. This takes two forms. The first is an intermittent barrage of javelins, darts and the occasional spear launched from several kilometres away outside the dead zone. Many miss, some slam into the dome or spire and bounce off. None of these weapons have any effect but the Travellers may not be aware of that. The larger ones do make ominous noises.

The second threat is from landships. Some of these slam their mass into the spire, others launch weapons at it. There are dozens of them, circling at a distance then closing in either to attack or simply fly past the spire. As with the other attacks there is no masterplan to this; the landships are simply driven to join in the attempt to breach the complex. They are mostly an impediment to the Travellers getting out – an attempt at crossing the dead zone is suicide, which only leaves a rescue by air as the viable option. The landships will have to be dealt with or distracted if this is to be attempted.

Running the Fight

There are so many Biologicals that the Travellers cannot win a stand-up fight. They may be reluctant to leave the complex and its potential riches but they will have to do so... or die here. This may not be entirely apparent early on in the attack, however. The Referee should run the initial underground incursion as a creepy, tense investigation into what is happening at the pool, escalating into a violent rearguard action as the Travellers retreat to the lift. The situation will then continue to escalate until it is obvious the Travellers are trapped and need to escape rather than attempting to defeat the Biologicals.

The Biologicals are powerful but limited. They are not creative and will repeat the same tactics over and over. A breach or forced door will be continually attacked;

another assault somewhere else is a separate matter rather than a deliberate diversion. The Referee does not have to keep track of the entire horde – this is not a wargame and there is no pretence of a fair fight here. The lack of cohesive action can be used to give the Travellers a break if they are in real trouble but those who try to munchkin their way to victory will be overwhelmed.

The probable course of the fight is a retreat from the caves followed by a defence of the cylinder levels against escalating opposition. Finally, the Travellers will have to get out of the complex. There are two obvious methods. One is to somehow clear a path through the main door and keep an area clear long enough to land a rescue craft; the other is to ascend to the top of the tower to be taken off. Both require the Travellers to solve certain problems.

OPERATING IN THE CYLINDER

Operating in the Cylinder becomes a problem once the inner door is breached. This does not take place until 21 hours after the attack begins, however, and the Travellers may be long gone by then. If not, they will have to defeat ambulators that manage to get in or hold them at the door. This is entirely doable by straight combat and perhaps the use of incendiary devices. These will do surprisingly little damage to the installation – this is one of the few places where using a flamethrower indoors is not a completely lunatic option.

The Travellers can move around and operate in the cylinder's upper floor for a whole day or more after the doors are breached, providing they conduct a good defence. Ammunition supply may be a problem here or exhaustion if the Travellers use blade weapons. The lower cylinder floor will not be breached from below for around two and a half days, so this may be a safe haven to rest and work if the Travellers have things to do before they bug out. Noises from the shaft down to the caves may be disconcerting but the Travellers are safe on this level until the complex becomes untenable. However, it is possible they may become trapped on this level if the upper floor is lost. If so, a breakout or a rescue from outside will be necessary.

THE AIR THREAT

The Air Threat is not much of a problem unless the Travellers open the hatch atop the spire. Of course, they need to do this in order to communicate with *Deepnight Revelation*, so communications might be an issue. Landships will not usually attack anyone atop the spire but will attack the spire itself and may drop ambulators onto the top. These will be dangerous for a time then die and degenerate into sludge. The bowl shape of the platform atop the spire means that, sooner

or later, opening the hatch will result in a rain of half-decomposed plant matter down the shaft, perhaps accompanied by a live ambulator or two.

The air threat is primarily an issue if the Travellers need to be airlifted to safety – which is entirely likely. The landships can be engaged by orbital laser fire but the attenuated weapons will damage them very slowly. Targeting will also be wayward due to atmospheric effects, although misses are likely to cause casualties among the Biological horde outside the complex, which will aid the Travellers' cause a little.

The landships can be distracted or drawn off, perhaps by enticing them to chase a small craft that stays just ahead of them until they are many kilometres away. This will not remove the whole threat but the Travellers' craft may be able to dodge around one or two landships or even eliminate them with weapons fire. If the Travellers treat the landships as a problem to be solved with good roleplaying and creative ideas, the Referee should look kindly upon them. Bulling through and expecting to win no matter what is, as usual, a recipe for defeat and disaster.

THE GROUND THREAT

The Ground Threat is essentially limitless. Whilst the complex is intact the ambulators can only get in through narrow choke points that can be held, with 'leakers' run down and eliminated. However, at some point the Travellers will be overwhelmed or run out of ammunition. If they somehow last long enough the structure will collapse around them.

Fire and incendiary weapons, including orbital laser fire, offer the chance to do large-scale damage to the Biological horde but will not eliminate it. Fires started among the Biologicals die down surprisingly quickly, and do not spread far, so the problem of the horde cannot be solved by just blasting it, although concentrated laser fire, incendiaries and hyperbaric charges could be used to clear a path for a daring escape. Ultimately, the most likely way out for the Travellers is to clear a path or area in some manner and bring in grav vehicles or small craft to conduct a rescue. This might mean having to go outside amid the smoke and heat of a minor conflagration but staying in the complex is not an alternative.

SALVAGE AND KNOWLEDGE

There is little or nothing the Travellers can rip up and take with them, although heavy damage to the complex may allow some of its component material to be collected.

NUKE THE SITE FROM ORBIT?

The Travellers might decide to resort to extreme measures. An airburst is the best option for widespread damage, although the only way to disperse the horde is to detonate a bomb close enough that the Travellers and the complex are in danger. If this rather desperate measure is taken, it will work quite well. Biologicals in the immediate vicinity will be incinerated and fires will be started over a large area by the thermal bloom from the bomb. Of course, there will be a mushroom cloud of radioactive dust and plant matter to deal with and the inevitable fallout. A detonation will clear the area for some time; it will be a day or so before the Biologicals outside the blast zone reach the complex and begin the attack anew. Root growth will continue undermining the complex throughout, so the collapse will occur anyway – possibly sooner than otherwise.

Normally, dropping a nuke on your own position is a bad idea but in this case it will actually work... more or less. The complex will withstand the blast from a ground-zero tactical nuclear strike, although it will be sufficiently damaged that its collapse is accelerated. The structure will absorb the thermal bloom and ionising radiation, storing it evenly throughout the complex. This will make the walls and all other structures painfully hot to touch and soon the air will be hazardous to breathe. This excess thermal energy is emitted by the upper surfaces of the structure at a high rate, causing an additional updraft that causes vortices in the mushroom cloud.

The result will be an intermittent rain of radioactive, burning ambulator components and the occasional intact Big One. A nuclear strike will gain the Travellers a chance to get out of the complex but it will still be lost. Indeed, nothing the Travellers do can change the fate of the complex. All the Travellers can hope for is to salvage something and save themselves.

This is worth 2D units of Exotic materials. There are no Ancients artefacts or weapons to be grabbed; no 'loot' in the conventional sense. Yet the Travellers can gain a lot from their adventure at the complex.

The first 'treasure' is insight. The Travellers can gain knowledge of how Oyskrusk's people thought and acted. They were certainly a bit full of themselves, willing to mess about with the evolution of a whole species just to see what they could learn – and to build monuments to their own greatness. This attitude was a part of the Ancients' success – indeed, it was more important than their technology. The Travellers will come to see that they saw themselves as masters of all; the universe was theirs to modify and experiment with. Perhaps that played a part in their downfall. This line of thinking might lead to a disturbing conclusion – what if Oyskrusk and his people decided they could control the Deepnight Entity or wanted to study it rather than destroy it?

The second is more tangible but is a benefit rather than an object. The expedition's scientists can gain a great deal of useful information if the Travellers take the trouble to collect it. Without psionic attuning to the installation's data storage – which is not possible for anyone on the mission, not even Droyne picked up in the area – it is impossible to download Oyskrusk's research. However, by studying the modified Biologicals and the bits and pieces of information the Travellers have gained at the installation, research is possible into some useful areas.

The Counteragent: Studying samples of the Biologicals' tissues will yield additional information on the Ancients' counteragent used to prevent infestation by the Deepnight Entity. This is a complex research project.

The Travellers cannot learn how to make a species permanently immune to infestation, although perhaps that would be possible after many years of work based on this information. They can learn how to generally 'harden' an ecosystem against infection, in the manner of the plant life encountered in *Deepnight Legacy*. This information could be the key to defeating the Deepnight Entity in the long run, if it can be conveyed back to Charted Space somehow.

Project Component	Type	Result
Stage 1: General Analysis	Quick, Average	The Travellers learn that the Biologicals were adapted to create their own counteragent as part of their life processes.
Stage 2: Biologicals' Counteragent	Typical, Average	Study of the Biologicals' counteragent increases the level of counteragent available to the Travellers by one.
Stage 3: Implementation of Counteragent	Lengthy, Average	The Travellers learn about the processes used by the Ancients to make the natural production of a counteragent a permanent part of the Biologicals' makeup.

Poisoning the Biologicals: A Lengthy, Routine research project will allow the Travellers to isolate the materials needed to create a poison effective against the Biologicals but which is not harmful to other plant life. This version of the poison is short-lived but can be used to eliminate an enclave or kill a group of ambulators. A spin-off of this project is the ability to predict which worlds are best suited to the Biologicals and which are borderline. Enclaves on the latter grow slowly and are weaker than normal. This also allows prediction of which regions of a planet are most likely to be desired by the Biologicals and which will probably be left alone.

The creation of a long-term poison that will make a world's ecosystem toxic to the Biologicals but not other life is conceivable although would be a long-term project for a major research facility. Even then, there is always the possibility that the Biologicals might adapt.

A TIMELINE

Taking the moment the installation's systems begin warning of a dropping level in the pool as T=0, the following timeline indicates the critical events of the final attack. The Referee can adjust as necessary.

MOVING ON

Once Oyskrusk's installation has been destroyed there is no real reason to stay. The Travellers might try to eliminate the Biologicals' homeworld to reduce the threat they pose but this can only be partially effective. It would be possible to find landships and rooted bioships and then destroy them and the multiple-braincase enclaves could also be sought out eventually. Most are close to the installation but some have been created in far corners of the planet.

The Travellers could, in theory, find all these enclaves and destroy them either from the ground or by less discriminate means such as nuclear bombardment, asteroid impact or seeding the area with poisonous material perhaps gathered from the wreckage of the installation. This would be a setback to the Biologicals, since their entire race's memories are stored in these multiple braincase enclaves. Other braincases have the same information but do not possess the capability to access or make much use of it. It is probable that multi-braincase enclaves will develop elsewhere, or perhaps already have, and these will be able to access all the 'memories' of braincases they come into contact with. However, eliminating the homeworld enclaves will set the Biologicals back a few thousand years at least.

Time (Hours)	Event
T=0	Water level in pool begins to drop
T+0.25	First ambulators reach the shaft doors
T+0.5	Vibrations in surrounding bedrock detected
T+1	Cave system is choked with ambulators
T+1.5	Surface attack begins
T+2	Tremors detected in surrounding rock
T+2.5	First ambulators reach the dome base
T+3	Spreader breaks through to the lower shaft door
T+4	Dome door attack begins
T+5	Tremors become noticeable without instruments
T+6	Lower shaft door is breached
T+10	Tremors begin to cause minor distortions in the structure of the installation
T+11	Outer dome door is breached
T+14	Inner dome door attack begins
T+21	Inner dome door is breached
T+54	Spreader reaches upper shaft door
T+58	Upper shaft door is breached; first ambulators enter the lower cylinder level from the caves
T+60	Signs of structural failure become apparent
T+200	Large rents and tears appear in the structure
T+300	Structural collapse occurs

C H A P T E R - T E N

THE SOLOMANI EXPEDITION



The Solomani expedition to the Voidshore is one of several long-range missions launched at intervals, usually with the aim of conducting general exploration and investigation of points of interest. It is not connected with the Deepnight Entity and indeed the Solomani crews know nothing about it. This particular mission was prompted by the discovery of old records dating from the Rule of Man era. During this period the gravitational anomaly at Terminus Point was discovered – possibly from captured Vilani materials – and a rather grandiose project to investigate it was implemented.

Surviving records are patchy but it seems that Rule of Man scientists believed there were additional secrets of gravitational manipulation to be unlocked and were pushing for investigation of natural phenomena to assist in this. An expedition of remarkable scope was planned, with at least two long-range support bases to be built. However, the Rule of Man was known as the Ramshackle Empire for a reason; the project collapsed and resources were directed elsewhere.

Now, centuries later, a mission has been launched to investigate the sites named in the Rule of Man archives. Rather smaller in scale than the original expedition, this one consists of three *Tenzing*-class exploration ships. Originally part of a nine-ship exploration group supported by the converted light carrier *Ustinov*, the Terminus Point expedition parted company with the main group after proceeding around 150 parsecs rimwards of Solomani space. Another three-ship group continued generally rimwards whilst three vessels and the supporting carrier began an exploration of the local area.

The three ships tasked with reaching Terminus Point are the RSS (Research Starship) *Frank Wild*, *Leonard Hussey* and *Angtharkay*. The former two are named for members of Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic expedition, whilst *Angtharkay* is named – like the class name-ship – for a great Sherpa mountaineer. RSS *Angtharkay* is the group's flagship, under the command of Captain Alicia Bruntein.

EXPEDITION PERSONNEL

The Solomani Confederation does not have an equivalent to the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service, so exploration is carried out by private companies or

the Confederation Navy. Civilian experts are sometimes included in an expedition, although commonly scientists and experts are current or former members of the navy's associate and consultancy programme. Acceptance into this programme requires former naval training or a course in naval operations, which both instils necessary skills and weeds out those likely to challenge naval authority.

As with all Solomani naval crews, there are representatives of Solomani Security (SolSec) aboard. Each ship has a political officer, whose task is to monitor the loyalty and competence of the naval personnel aboard. On an exploration ship, a political officer will also be capable of doubling up into one or more roles, providing the ship with an additional officer at need. The presence of a political officer is seen by outsiders – and some Solomani – as rather sinister but on the whole the political officer and captain form a partnership that can be very effective. The political officer is empowered to remove a captain from command, and even to execute personnel in extreme circumstances, but for the most part simply offers advice from a 'good of the Solomani cause' perspective.

All orders given by the captain of a Solomani ship are subject to the ratification or veto of its political officer, although how this is implemented depends on the officers involved. On some ships the political officer will flaunt their authority and insist on ratifying every order but this is an abuse of authority. At the other extreme a 'see you at dinner' approach is used, with the assumption that the captain is not a traitor or a fool leading to the political officer taking a very minor role in the ship's affairs. Political officers also act as ambassadors and liaise with other services – ideally through their own political officers.

The personnel selected for a long-range exploration mission tend to be of proven loyalty and competence, so the political officer's main role is somewhere between that of an advisor and a mental health observer. Attitudes vary among the crew – some are reassured by the presence of a political guardian, most just accept it as a fact of life and a few secretly or openly resent it. The crews themselves may be of a different character to what the Travellers expect. After

all, the Travellers are the product of Imperial society, in which the Solomani are traditionally seen as – at best – misguided sometime antagonists.

On the other hand, all of the expedition's crewmembers are human and are the product of a society that views the Imperium as – at best – misguided sometime antagonists. The crew are all assured that humans are the best of all species in the universe but few are 'human supremacists'. The great majority – perhaps to the surprise of the Travellers – are entirely respectful towards non-humans; they just know that however good an alien might be, a human is just slightly better.

SHIPS OF THE EXPEDITION

The expedition flagship is RSS *Angtharkay*. *Angtharkay* is the oldest ship in the flotilla, with a long and prestigious service career. She was refitted before the expedition and started out in excellent condition. Although *Angtharkay* has picked up some damage here and there, she is still a fine vessel. Morale among her crew is generally high; her personnel are smartly turned out when it matters but relaxed when not 'on show'.

RSS *Angtharkay*'s commanding officer is Captain Alicia Bruntein. A little long in the tooth for such a mission, Bruntein deferred an already overdue promotion to commodore in order to command this mission. She is loyal and dedicated, and forms a solid partnership with her much younger political officer, Commander Theresa Arif. Arif is almost the opposite of Bruntein; she was rushed through the ranks in order to take the top slot on the Terminus Point expedition and has grown into her role under Bruntein's tutelage. Together they run a tight ship with a relaxed crew and might be an example of the very best the Solomani Confederation Navy has to offer.

Given free rein, presiding officer Commander Teller of the RSS *Leonard Hussey* would make every system scan a cartographic triumph glorifying himself and he resents Lieutenant-Commander Haif-al-Tarik's (political officer) insistence on a more truthful style of reporting. For his part Haif-al-Tarik is cynical, mistrustful and bad-tempered, resulting in a tendency to punish minor infractions far more harshly than is necessary. The ship and crew are always smart in terms of appearance but

this impression is hollow. Ship and crew are actually tired and functioning at a reduced efficiency due to internal conflicts. The need to conceal any problems for fear of retribution results in problems not being addressed until they have become critical.

RSS *Frank Wild* is currently missing, presumed lost. She apparently misjumped several months ago and despite a search no sign was found of her. The expedition reluctantly continued without her, not realising that she was taking a parallel course and searching for her fellows. RSS *Frank Wild* is not a lucky ship. At the time of her misjump her captain – Commander Rex Whelan – was suffering from a fatigue-induced breakdown. Judging the executive officer unsuitable to take command, her political officer took charge.

Thus Lieutenant Damietta Carstairs of Solomani Security, out of her depth and unable to trust the crew, is currently doing her best to continue the mission and find the other ships. Her crew were not mutinous at the time of the takeover, she just lacked the ability to judge whether they could be trusted. However, she is now maintaining control with the assistance of a handful of SolSec 'monitors' among the crew whilst the captain is confined to his quarters. The situation aboard *Frank Wild* is becoming explosive and it is only a matter of time before disaster strikes... again.

THE EXPEDITION'S AGENDA

The Solomani ships are on a peaceful exploration mission. They know nothing about the Deepnight Entity and intend only to investigate gravitational phenomena culminating in the one at Terminus Point. The expedition's personnel will not reveal much about their mission to outsiders, however, which may make the Travellers suspicious. Likewise, it will be difficult to convince the Solomani of the threat posed by the Deepnight Entity unless they witness it. At that point they will agree it must be destroyed. Some of the mission's personnel might actually join the Travellers and it is even possible they will give one of their ships to the Travellers to be sent home as a messenger craft. This requires a wholehearted commitment, transcending wars and decades of mistrust and would be no small matter.

PICTURES OF HOME

The first encounter with the Solomani expedition may come as a complete surprise to the Travellers. It can occur in any star system of the Voidshore region but is more likely in one that is of interest to explorers. The Referee can transplant this adventure to any system the Travellers visit but in such a huge region of space a chance encounter is far more likely in a system that will draw in explorers. Indeed, the assumption is that the Travellers enter a system to investigate it, then just a few hours later the Solomani ship arrives for the same reason. A default location is presented below but both location and circumstances can be tailored as necessary.

THE VS-B2S-M-3 SYSTEM

The star system initially designated VS-B2S-M-3 (Solo Type M star catalogued in the second batch surveyed in the Voidshore region) centres on an unremarkable M1 (red) main sequence star. The system is mostly composed of gas giants, with three rockballs and what at first appears to be a habitable planet. Primary 2 is in fact more or less habitable, with extensive ocean cover and an oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere but it orbits close to the outer edge of the system's warm zone.

VS-B2S-M-3 PRIMARY (M1 Main Sequence Star)

Primary 1	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 2	(X967000-O)
Primary 3	(Large Gas Giant)
Primary 4	(X410000-O)
Primary 5	(X100000-O)
Primary 6	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 7	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 8	(Small Gas Giant)
Primary 9	(X200000-O)
Primary 10	(Small Gas Giant)

Primary 2

Primary 2 is too cold to be a pleasant world but is quite capable of supporting life. There are huge taiga forests in the mid latitudes, with regions closer to the equator possessing a temperate ecosystem. Ice coverage and glaciation is extensive, contributing to an increased albedo that further locks the world into eternal winter. At sea level near to the equator it is possible to operate

outdoors with no greater protection than a thick coat and good boots but even in the tropics specialist arctic gear is required.

Nevertheless there are fish in the seas and abundant plant and animal life in the less chilly regions. Most herbivores are curious-looking things with a tubby body to retain warmth and a long, agile neck to reach the most nutritious parts of the tough plant life. Storms can move in quickly and pose a serious threat to unprotected personnel but with good weather monitoring Primary 2 is reasonably safe for a rest and resupply operation. There are no signs of intelligent life, nor of any species even approaching the threshold of self-awareness.

NEW ARRIVALS

As the Travellers go about whatever they decide to do in the system, be it simply refuelling at a gas giant or sending landing parties down to the mainworld, *Deepnight Revelation's* sensors register a jump emergence. Emergence parameters suggest a 2,000-ton vessel using a conventional jump drive. Additional data follows in a steady stream as the Travellers' sensors process and correlate incoming information.

The ship is in the vicinity of Primary 2, on what appears to be a rather poor vector. A good emergence would place the ship between 101–110 diameters with residual momentum aligned such that the ship required minimal time and course changes to establish a stable orbit. This vessel is at 145 diameters and headed away from the target world. This is obviously not intentional; within moments she begins to come about and accelerate towards the planet.

The vessel is not displaying an active transponder, although that is by no means uncommon outside settled space. The hull lines and general parameters give an indication of the ship's origin; *Deepnight Revelation's* automated ship-recognition system suggests the newcomer may be a *Tenzing* exploration ship – a design used by the Solomani Confederation and a few operators outside its borders. Confidence in this identification is initially 62% but rises to almost 100% once additional data has been gathered.



The newcomer vessel is apparently slower to detect *Deepnight Revelation*. This would not be unusual – a jump emergence tends to be rather obvious whereas a ship already in system may take a little longer to be detected. However, the other vessel's crew does seem to be rather slow off the mark. Eventually the orbital-entry manoeuvre is modified to a higher orbit, which would give more opportunities to evade or re-enter jump if necessary and the new arrival starts broadcasting an interrogative code standard throughout Charted Space: 'What Ship?'

There is no other communication at this point.

This skittish behaviour is entirely reasonable, given the huge size difference between the two vessels and the fact that a Solomani vessel would carry recognition databases, which will have identified an Imperial heavy cruiser within moments of detection. What happens next is up to the Travellers; the newcomer's power levels increase and she clearly has weapons and nuclear dampers active but that is a wise precaution in such a situation and does not indicate aggression.

The Travellers' position might be more awkward if they have personnel planetside but realistically they hold all the cards. The Imperium is not at war with the Solomani Confederation, although there has been considerable tension at times. The Travellers outgun the newcomer by a huge margin, so starting a fight would be suicide for the Solomani vessel. However, its responses to the situation will not always be optimal and might result in an accidental clash.

The newcomer vessel is Research Starship *Frank Wild*, with her captain confined to quarters, a Solomani Security officer in command and the crew on the verge of mutiny. The bad emergence vector angered Lieutenant Damietta Carstairs, the current commanding officer and her berating of the bridge crew distracted everyone concerned. There is real tension on the bridge of that ship. The crew are weary of harsh treatment and lack confidence in the commanding officer and now they are confronted with an Imperial Navy cruiser. Some crewmembers are considering trying to overpower the SolSec monitors who support Carstairs, perhaps reinstating the captain. Others are wavering. It would not take much to trigger a full-scale mutiny.

Lieutenant Carstairs Commanding

If the Travellers open communications they will receive a reply after a delay of a few minutes. Screen-to-screen communications show a neat and orderly starship bridge, smartly uniformed crewmembers at their posts and others, wearing sidearms, posted at the bridge doors and the captain's command position. The Travellers may at first believe the Solomani are putting on a show.

The commanding officer of the other ship presents herself in clipped, almost rude style: 'This is Confederation Navy Vessel RSS *Frank Wild*, Lieutenant Damietta Carstairs commanding. What ship are you?'

Carstairs wears a standard black Solomani Navy uniform with lieutenant's insignia but her hat is dark grey rather than navy black. Travellers with knowledge of the Confederation will know this means she is a Solomani Security officer rather than 'straight' navy. That implies she is the ship's political officer but she has presented herself as its commander. That and the fact that a mere lieutenant would surely not be in command of a vessel sent so far from home, suggests either that her ship has had a difficult time or there is a very large Solomani Confederation Navy presence in the area.

Carstairs will exchange some general information but refuse to answer any question that impacts the security of her expedition. She is up-front about this, simply stating she is not going to answer that question. She will reveal that her vessel is part of a multi-ship expedition conducting peaceful exploration in the region but will not say how many other vessels are nearby or reveal their type. She is wary of the Travellers, which is understandable but her attitude is affected by the paranoia she has been dealing with since taking over the ship.

Normally there would be no chance that a small vessel like a *Tenzing* class would attack a much more powerful one, but Carstairs' mental state is such that she might actually consider it. The only scenario likely to result in an attack is one where the Travellers are threatening and Carstairs thinks a sucker punch followed by rapid escape is the only viable option. Even in her paranoid state she is aware of how staggeringly outgunned she is and that her crew might refuse the order.

The result of this attitude is a rather unfriendly exchange between the two ships, with both crews wanting to know what the other is up to and what they intend to do but the Solomani at least being completely unwilling to divulge information. The Travellers might go about resolving this situation with diplomacy or more direct methods – they might be able to force the

Solomani vessel to surrender if they demonstrate a willingness to use force. The fact that this would be an act of war is irrelevant if the Solomani Confederation never finds out about it.

Whilst this exchange is happening, the Travellers will become aware of a secondary signal being sent from the Solomani vessel. It is buried in the general emissions and transmissions of the ship, and consists of a simple text message: 'Captain confined, political officer in command. Situation unstable. Will cooperate if you assist.'

The message repeats in a pre-recorded loop. The transmission uses an Imperial communications protocol, which might suggest to the Travellers that there is an Imperial spy aboard. This is not the case. The message was sent by a communications technician familiar with Imperial codes from service along the borders. It is an act of treason, inviting a foreign power to assist in a mutiny against an officer in lawful command of a Solomani Confederation starship.

Carstairs' assumption of command was indeed lawful, although she has proven unfit for the job ever since. There is no protocol for the removal of a political officer in Solomani service – only a superior SolSec officer can remove or relieve a political officer whereas the political officer can relieve anyone aboard the ship of duty. So, if the Travellers do intervene they are committing an act of war against the Solomani Confederation. However, this could be reinterpreted as 'assisting a friendly power' with a bit of collaborative log-writing. Whatever the Travellers do next, the situation aboard *Frank Wild* is about to come to a head.

THIS IS MUTINY, CAPTAIN!

Aboard the RSS *Frank Wild*, a plot has been hatching for some time. The captain, whose mental state has been only a little improved by his 'enforced rest' under confinement to quarters, has managed to communicate his override codes to members of the crew remaining loyal to him. Exactly what the crew would do with them had not been decided but the arrival of *Deepnight Revelation* has created an opportunity. The crew are desperate enough that collaborating with a foreign power to overthrow their new commanding officer – and perhaps becoming prisoners of the Imperials – is preferable to what they fully expect to happen if the situation continues.

The crew of *Frank Wild* are (rightly) convinced that Lieutenant Carstairs will get them killed sooner or later but until now could see no viable alternatives. The other

two ships of the expedition have been out of contact for months, their jump drive is in a terrible state and has already misjumped twice and Carstairs does not seem to know what she is doing. They are apparently wandering about aimlessly, looking for the rest of the expedition. This is not quite accurate; Carstairs knows of projected emergency rendezvous points where the expedition might drop beacons or wait for her ship but is struggling to reach them due to the wayward jump drive. The outcome is the same however; the situation is simply untenable.

The crew of RSS *Frank Wild* falls into three camps. A few crewmembers and four Solomani Security 'monitors' are loyal to Carstairs and willing to fight to support her. This does not necessarily mean they think she is right but she represents 'the system' that will punish them for going against her and they have a long habit of obedience. This faction has control of the armoury and all firearms aboard the ship. The opposite faction is about the same in number and comprises those opposed to Carstairs for personal reasons, out of loyalty to the captain or desperation because they know Carstairs will get them killed. The remaining crewmembers are undecided or want to stay out of a potentially messy business.

The best plan the mutineers can come up with, given they have no weapons, is to wait until Carstairs is not on the bridge then use the captain's override codes to shut down drives, weapons and security access. They will overpower the SolSec monitor in the engineering section and lock themselves in. If Carstairs is locked out of the bridge she cannot rescind the override. She will be able to get onto the bridge sooner or later but the mutineers hope to obtain help from the Travellers in the meantime. It is not a great plan but it is the best they have.

The mutineers pick their moment and strike. The Travellers will be aware that *Frank Wild's* emissions have changed but cannot be sure exactly what has happened. They will then receive another transmission from the Solomani vessel, sent in much the same manner as the first but more explicit: 'Weapons and drives disabled. Time extremely limited. Attempting to regain control from political officer. Please assist.'

This is a difficult situation and the Travellers do not have long to respond. The mutiny has not gone quite as planned – two mutineers and the SolSec monitor in engineering are badly wounded and Carstairs is already attempting to get out of her locked quarters and onto the bridge. The captain is still confined and cannot assist, so the ship is drifting. Sooner or later, even if the

mutineers are not dug out of the engineering spaces, they will have to give Carstairs control of the ship again or fall into the mainworld's atmosphere.

If the Travellers do not intervene the mutiny will eventually fail. Carstairs will hold a fair and impartial trial for all suspected mutineers then execute them out of hand, leaving her with half a crew and a dying ship. She will refuse to cooperate with the Travellers and seek to leave the system as soon as possible. However, between the decaying jump drive and skeleton crew, *Frank Wild* will be unable to jump and Carstairs will be forced to negotiate with the Travellers from a position of utter helplessness.

The Travellers could intervene directly or threaten the use of force in order to obtain a surrender. It would not be hard to blast bits off the Solomani ship until her crew are forced to surrender. This leaves the Travellers with a wreck that could be looted and some prisoners, raising questions of what to do with them. None of the Solomani will be well disposed towards the foreigners who attacked them and even if any agree to join the crew of *Deepnight Revelation* they will always be suspect.

If the Travellers instead make a boarding of the Solomani vessel, they will encounter minimal resistance. Carstairs had four monitors, one of whom is down in the engineering spaces and will not arm anyone else. They will resist a boarding under any circumstances but this is a token gesture only. The Travellers might fail to realise that and kill all defenders but really all they have to do is to give the monitors a reason to surrender. Even if the Travellers insist they want to quell the mutiny, Carstairs will order a resistance to be made – there are no circumstances where she will hand over a Solomani Confederation ship to a foreign power. She might be willing to quickly reinstate the captain so that he can surrender, however...

Once they have control of the Solomani ship the Travellers can try to sort out the situation and decide what to do next. Different crewmembers will obviously have differing opinions on what has happened and why, so it may require a few interviews to put together a clear picture.

THE *FRANK WILD* SITUATION

The ship's logs are heavily encrypted and will not be willingly opened to the Travellers. If they go beyond the bounds of civilised behaviour, for example killing

or threatening to kill crewmembers, the Solomani officers will surrender the log encryption keys but the Travellers may face censure from their own crew. If they are not willing to take such measures the Travellers will have to rely on testimony from crewmembers and data stored in secondary systems; for example, the jump drive maintenance and use logs are accessible to all engineering personnel. It will not be hard to find someone willing to grant access, which will corroborate elements of the narrative woven by the crew.

General Crewmembers will tell the Travellers various versions of the same story. Everyone was exhausted and stressed, there was a misjump and contact was lost with the rest of the expedition. Lieutenant Carstairs relieved the captain of duty (some crewmembers support this, some oppose it, some are vague about their feelings on the subject) and there was a second misjump during her attempt to regain contact with the expedition. The ship is in a worse state than it looks but every crewmember has a good reason why someone else is to blame.

Commander Rex Whelan, the ship's commanding officer, is unwilling to admit that he was anything more than 'very, very tired' and insists that whilst a political officer has the right to relieve a captain if she feels there is a need, Carstairs' judgement was flawed due to her own extreme fatigue and paranoia. He has spent several weeks confined to quarters, which has not done him any good and an evaluation by an impartial professional would almost certainly rule him to be unstable and unfit for command without a period of rest and recuperation undertaken in a more pleasant environment than a tiny starship cabin. Whelan knows of several emergency rendezvous points – typically systems with distinctive stars – and believes Carstairs was heading for one of them. He is amenable to cooperation with the Travellers, especially if they make it look like they strong-armed him. That will look better at the inevitable court-martial than wilful collaboration.

Lieutenant Damietta Carstairs, political officer and acting captain, is paranoid and utterly adamant that she acted correctly. Her appraisal of the captain's state of mind is far more damning than the evidence suggests but she acted within her remit given what she claims to genuinely believe about the situation. Once in command she faced resistance from the crew – there are many who will say she is overplaying this as well – and was forced to take harsh measures to preserve the ship and continue with the mission. She knows of the emergency rendezvous points and is trying to reach one. This, she hopes, will reunite her with the expedition and perhaps allow her to lay down the self-imposed burden of command over a rebellious crew. Carstairs can be convinced to cooperate with the Travellers to facilitate the rendezvous but not easily. She knows her own position is perilous and needs a way to ensure her survival both in political and physical terms.

A POSSIBLE SOLUTION

The Travellers have the facilities to undertake some repairs on the jump drive of RSS *Frank Wild*. Their own experience of long-term drive deterioration will enable them to offset most of the problems and will consume a small amount of components compared to repairs on *Deepnight Revelation's* drive system. A field repair can be conducted in a few days, rendering *Frank Wild* safe to travel, at least for the time being. If the Travellers do not think of it, someone will suggest the idea of making a repair then proceeding in company to the rendezvous point. It may be wise to swap some personnel between the two ships, reducing friction among the Solomani crew.

If the Travellers decide to do this, they will have to choose which commanding officer they want in charge of *Frank Wild*. Although the decision is not really theirs to make, neither candidate will serve under the other and each has several loyal crewmembers. The Travellers are the only ones capable of resolving this deadlock. It is possible that by now both are dead and the ship is a wreck, in which case data on the rendezvous point can be extracted from logs after a lengthy decryption process.

STANDING ON THE EDGE

If the Travellers do not seek a rendezvous with the Solomani expedition, they will encounter the surviving ships when they arrive at a suitable jumping-off point for the Great Rift crossing. This might be all three of the Solomani vessels if the Travellers have not already encountered *Frank Wild*. If so, the difficult situation aboard RSS *Frank Wild* may not have been resolved and the Travellers could arrive in the middle of a tense conference between the three ships.

If the Travellers obtain information on the rendezvous point they will instead encounter *Leonard Hussey* and *Angtharkay* in orbit over bodies in a system centring on an expanding K5 (orange) pre-giant star. Arriving in company with RSS *Frank Wild* will cause a lot less alarm than if *Deepnight Revelation* arrives alone. Either way, there is a lot to discuss, with potential benefits all around. The Solomani know they are at a disadvantage in terms of military power and they have other problems besides. If the Travellers are diplomatic this can work out to everyone's advantage.

All three of the Solomani ships are suffering from the same deterioration in their jump drives that the Travellers have experienced. If the Travellers made repairs to *Frank Wild* then she is in the best condition. If they did not she is probably the worst but it is only a matter of time before a serious breakdown occurs. The Solomani expedition is many years from home with no backup and no chance of obtaining repairs – other than courtesy of the Travellers.

The expedition's mission is to study the gravitational anomaly at Terminus Point but the current topic of discussion is whether the dangerous transit should be attempted at all. The expedition knows of a suitable jumping-off point, which was scouted by *Angtharkay* whilst *Leonard Hussey* waited here for *Frank Wild*. The crossing requires consecutive four-parsec jumps and the engineering crews are already advising against this. A few more might or might not affect the ability of the expedition to get home using a reduced jump capability.

If the Travellers are willing to do a deal, the Solomani have a proposal. The Referee can draw out the discussion as much as seems fitting but the general framework is as follows.

All vessels will proceed to the jumping-off point together. It has a habitable world with ample food to be harvested and is suitable for an extended rest or waiting period. There, *Deepnight Revelation* will carry out repairs to the drives of two of the Solomani ships whilst the third – the one with the drive in best condition, which is likely to be *Frank Wild* if she is present at all – scouts the crossing route. It is not certain whether fuel is available at one of the two potential refuelling points, so an advance scout can confirm this before *Deepnight Revelation* risks the crossing. If the scout vessel does not return, it is probably stranded without fuel. A rescue might be possible with a smaller ship, especially since a much lesser amount of fuel is needed to make the crossing. Whilst the route is being scouted, the other Solomani ships will be repaired and resources can be gathered.

Assuming the route is viable, the Solomani expedition leader – Captain Alicia Bruntein – proposes a way for both expeditions to complete their mission whilst ensuring word gets back to Charted Space of what has been discovered. She has doubts about her own vessels' ability to make the jump-4 crossing and get back without imposing unacceptable wear on the drives, so she suggests a party be carried aboard *Deepnight Revelation* when she visits Terminus Point. The Solomani can conduct their own gravitic-anomaly research from *Deepnight Revelation's* labs and will share their data. They will assist as best they can with the Travellers' own mission.

Meanwhile the two or three remaining Solomani ships will be prepared for the return voyage. One ship will be placed at the disposal of the Travellers and crewed by their own people. These ships will wait for three months and if *Deepnight Revelation* does not return from Terminus Point will depart for home with both expeditions' records aboard. If three ships remain, Bruntein suggests that it might make an attempt to reach Terminus Point. Perhaps there will be survivors; perhaps it will be able to carry word home of what happened. This is only possible if RSS *Frank Wild* is in useable condition, of course. If the Travellers fired on her she will not be capable of such an undertaking and will spend the rest of eternity as a wreck here in the Voidshore region.



In short, Captain Bruntein is offering to risk her life proving the crossing is viable and to give the Travellers a Solomani Confederation exploration ship – ensuring that a record of their adventures up to this point reaches home – in return for the chance to complete her own mission without risking her people in a dangerous crossing that may be beyond the capabilities of their ships.

There are implications here for the campaign. This is a chance for the Travellers to restock on everything from equipment and vehicles to skilled personnel and ensure their story is told even if they never return from Terminus Point. It also allows any Traveller who wants to leave the expedition to return to Charted Space – eventually – or begin a new set of adventures in the Far Side of Nowhere. At the very least, this is a chance to ensure word gets back to Charted Space of everything the Travellers have learned and let the folks back home know they were true to their cause. The ships that return will bear witness that the Travellers reached Terminus Point. If on the other hand the Travellers simply blast the Solomani ships and loot the wrecks, it is likely that no-one will ever know what happened. That is a two-edged sword – there are no consequences but also no-one to tell the tale of the Travellers' last great adventure.

POINT AMUNDSEN

The Solomani expedition designated the jumping-off point for their projected crossing to Terminus Point as Point Amundsen, after Roald Amundsen. In this case it was not his expedition to the south pole that inspired the name but his status as the first captain to successfully navigate the Northwest Passage through the arctic. The Solomani will

stick to their name for the system no matter what name the Travellers try to give it but will accept Terminus Point as the designation for the final destination.

The system's primary is an ordinary K5 (orange) main sequence star, orbited by a gas giant, two planetoid belts and a couple of rockballs, in addition to Amundsen 4. Although located close to the outer edge of the warm zone, Amundsen 4 has a dense atmosphere which traps heat from its star. Its ecosystem is highly advanced, with many species of higher animals on land and in the seas. These are largely pseudo-reptilian, with snakes and various forms of thecodont being most prevalent. Many of the larger predators are large and aggressive enough to pose a hazard to humans but there are far more herbivore species than predators.

POINT AMUNDSEN PRIMARY (K5 Main Sequence Star)

Amundsen 1	(X220000-0)
Amundsen 2	(Large Gas Giant)
Amundsen 3	(X000000-0)
Amundsen 4	(X788000-0)
Amundsen 5	(X000000-0)
Amundsen 6	(X321000-0)

Scouting Four

The promised habitable planet is likely to become known to the crews as 'Four', referring to its orbital position. From orbit, little can be seen directly through the thick cloud base but radar mapping shows an eroded world with rounded mountains and broad plains on the leeward side of the larger ranges. Open areas tend to be very wet, criss-crossed by multiple small watercourses. There are plenty of regions characterised by low hills, which would be suitable for a planetside base.

Closer study requires sending personnel to the surface. The Solomani expedition already conducted a brief surface survey and found conditions to be acceptable, although the local wildlife was considered hazardous. Sample analysis indicates the world has no unusual toxins or serious hazards other than the animal life, which is sufficiently dangerous to pose a threat to small groups of personnel.

The Solomani approach to studying a habitable planet or taking a rest there is to land two of their ships at a time. These may be landed at the same or different points and temporarily become the centre of a forward exploration base, whilst rotating which ship remains in orbit. If their proposal to scout the route has been accepted, they will offer to land one ship as the centrepiece of a base, keeping one in orbit or for whatever tasks are necessary. This is only possible if the Solomani still have three ships, of course.

Repairs to the jump drives of the Solomani ships are best carried out on the ground. With the assistance of *Deepnight Revelation* the task will put each ship out of commission in turn for a couple of weeks. Without her assistance the job will take at least three times as long and not result in a long-term remedy. Either way it will be necessary to set up a planetside camp around the grounded ship.

The Travellers and their crew will be very busy with these tasks, which can generate endless minor incidents and adventures. With so many people and vehicles coming and going it is not desirable to keep track of exactly who is where and doing what, so adventures can involve characters from previous incidents. For example, it might be interesting to see what Myself makes of the interaction between the Travellers' crew and the Solomani – the idea of more than one culture may be quite baffling to him. A band of Alikeaia or Droyne might be assigned to some task suited to their unique viewpoint and skills. It may be that someone involved in a previous mishap might get into trouble again or may have learned from earlier mistakes. The time on Four is a last chance for the Referee to remind the Travellers about the places they have been and the people they are working with.

Camp Amundsen

Unless the Travellers insist on another name the base will be called Camp Amundsen by the Solomani. They propose constructing an earth palisade with a ditch around the entire camp and setting up semi-permanent structures within it. The camp will be operational for months, so it is worth the work to make it as secure

and useable as possible. Whichever ship is grounded can provide power, fabrication facilities and the like, and act as a garage for vehicles. There is a lot of work involved in setting up the camp and at the same time the exploration of Four can begin. Typically this will take place on three levels of focus at once.

General Exploration is on an anything-and-everything basis. Parties may be landed from orbit or use grav vehicles to reach remote places – or undertake a long 'ATV cruise' stopping to check out anything interesting. General Exploration forays are intended to build up a 'big picture' of the planet and identify locations or phenomena that might be worth a closer look.

Location-Specific tasks are general in nature within a focused location such as a particular region of a mountain range or the area around the base camp. This is the most important location-specific task and also the most convenient to carry out. A large proportion of available personnel will be assigned to this task, with vehicles and foot parties constantly coming and going.

Close-Focus tasks are targeted at investigating something specific such as the feeding habits of a local predator. This might require operating in different areas over time or splitting a party to carry out tasks at two widely separated locations. A close-focus investigation will often follow a general exploration or a team may be tasked with carrying out general exploration until they reach a particular point where they have something specific to do.

The upshot of all this is that the base camp at Four will be a hive of activity even before it is finished. How well the Solomani and Imperial crews get along depends on many factors but there will certainly be some wariness and friction at first. The Travellers may try to establish cooperation and mix up members of both expeditions in the hope of creating a homogenous team or might keep them apart as much as possible. Either approach can work if well handled.

It is not possible to keep personnel apart entirely, especially during downtime, and how the crews interact during their leisure time is a useful gauge of how well integrated they are becoming. Unless prevented somehow the crews will hold impromptu barbeques, play The Game or its equivalent and generally try to enjoy themselves. This creates opportunities for friction – intentional or otherwise – as well as building friendships. Even if the crews are supposed to be segregated there will be those who barge into a beer session just to show how macho and assertive they are, or sneak off to meet up with someone from 'the other lot'.

THE RECONNAISSANCE MISSION

Reconnaissance of the projected route to Terminus Point requires making two 4-parsec jumps, with refuelling time, then back again. It is not intended that the reconnaissance ship actually go to Terminus Point; determining that there is fuel to be had within four parsecs of the final destination is sufficient, so the round trip requires about four weeks in jump and at least a few days more for refuelling. An estimate of six weeks at earliest likely return seems reasonable and if the reconnaissance mission has not returned after eight weeks it is probable that difficulties have been encountered. The Travellers will need to decide how to proceed if that happens.

This gives the Travellers at least six weeks on Four, assuming their ship is fully prepared to leave the moment work arrives that the route is viable. It would perhaps be wiser to make final preparations after the reconnaissance mission returns, especially if some of the personnel from the mission intend to travel aboard *Deepnight Revelation*.

The reconnaissance mission will be commanded by Captain Bruntein herself and to reduce friction she is going to 'borrow' some crew from the troubled *Frank Wild*. They will be evaluated and possibly shown the error of their ways during this mission but in any case Bruntein is adamant that this is her problem rather than something the Travellers deal with. Her tone suggests the trip will not be pleasant for some of those involved. In the meantime there is plenty for the Travellers to do on Four. In addition to overhauling the jump drives of the Solomani ships they may have work to do on their own vessels, supplies to gather and personnel to select.

Exactly which of the Solomani personnel they take with them to Terminus Point is up to the Travellers. This gives the Referee an opportunity to fill any gaps in the crew of *Deepnight Revelation*, bearing in mind that the Solomani mission has only about 70 personnel in total remaining. It might be awkward to have the captain of a starship aboard and political officers might not be welcome either – although the Solomani will push for the inclusion of at least some SolSec personnel in leadership positions. Thus the most likely personnel mix would be about 20 or so crewmembers with a couple of junior officers to lead them. Candidates will no doubt become apparent during the operations on Four.

INTEROPERABILITY, YEAH THAT'S IT!

Members of the two expeditions inevitably want to try out each other's gear or show off their own. The Solomani expedition's grav platforms have proven popular with members of the Travellers' crew, with increasingly thin excuses offered why one would be better suited to a task than one of the Travellers' own vehicles. It is thus no surprise when a general-exploration mission equipment and personnel request contains mostly crew from *Deepnight Revelation* using one of the Solomani large ATVs and a pair of grav platforms. The Solomani commanders are fine with this so long as they can borrow some interesting bits of kit from the Travellers – nothing classified, of course.

The end result is a proposal for a five-day exploration mission in which an ATV (one of the Solomani FAMAT-12s) is landed from one of the Travellers' craft and will make a transit of a low-lying area about 300 kilometres from the base camp. The grav platforms are absolutely essential as outriders, of course, and allow the exploration team to quickly check out anything the ATV's sensors pick up. Written up sympathetically, this could be presented as an important experiment in 'interoperability of personnel and equipment' and could have beneficial results in terms of team-building and familiarity with one another's gear.

Thus a general exploration team is put together and landed. The landing point is prosaically designated Start Point G14-A and the destination as End Point G14-B. The route between G14 A and B is up to the crew. The mission is initially intended to be for five days after which the crew will be picked up by small craft and replacements brought in or the vehicles returned to base if they need maintenance. This is fluid, however; the transit may take longer or the crew may continue for a few more days if their findings justify it.

The journey is through low-lying terrain, which is often marshy. This is generally not a problem for an ATV, even a large one, but can be slow going. The grav vehicles allow some members of the expedition to range out from the ATV and investigate, explore or perhaps just whizz about the countryside having some fun. They are also tasked with scouting the route ahead or acting as remote sensor platforms to build up a picture of the surrounding terrain.

Day One

The ATV is landed atop a low hill and the crew begin an on-foot exploration of the immediate area. Samples are taken and subjected to preliminary analysis whilst the grav vehicles map the area in more detail. It is not planned that the ATV will move this day, so activities will in part be concerned with ensuring the site is safe for a camp and undertaking a complete survey of plant and animal life. One member of the assigned team considers this an opportunity for some specialist research – which means shooting as many different local animals as possible, using the greatest variety of weapons possible.

The default identity for this wannabee Nimrud is Daniel Ryder, probably a member of the Solomani expedition. His profile, presented on page 101, assumes this. If the Travellers buy into Ryder's antics they may become involved in a contest to vaporise the most inoffensive of creatures with the most inappropriate weapon. This will win them Ryder as a firm friend, although it may upset others. If the Travellers do not permit this sort of thing Ryder will grudgingly obey but they will find him as most others do – a rather sour and grouchy sort who does not talk much and makes everyone around him wish he talked less.

The day goes well enough, with samples taken and no real problems. The crew will want to have a cookout, possibly with whatever is left of the animals Ryder has shot. Even shipboard rations are improved by being badly half-cooked over an open fire with a few beers – or so some of the expedition personnel think. The night is otherwise uneventful, although it does rain hard in the early hours.

Day Two

Day two sets the tone for the rest of the expedition in many ways. The 12-wheel ATV makes light work of most obstacles and is not difficult to drive. It is also very stable, enabling crewmembers to sleep in their bunks or work without being thrown around the compartment – at least, most of the time. Occasionally the ATV finds an obstacle it cannot easily cope with but usually the sensor suite will give a warning. Having to stop work and strap in for a few minutes can become annoying but it is the unexpected jolt when a couple of wheels find a big rock hidden under a thin layer of mud that really shakes up the crew. It turns out the FAMAT-12 gives a smooth ride until it does not.

Other than this the day is not eventful. Samples are taken at various stops and the grav platforms are sent to investigate rock formations, small lakes, larger

watercourses and other minor points of interest. Later on the way attention turns to finding somewhere dry to park up. Slogging through axle-deep water, mud or reeds is not a problem during the day but if the Travellers want to go outside they will have to find higher ground. This is not much of a problem providing they plan ahead. There is always the possibility that what looks like a firm hill is made up mostly of reeds and loose mud, making it unsuitable. Good use of the grav platforms will prevent wasting time sliding slowly back down to the bottom of a faux hill.

Day Three

The land rises a little, becoming dryer, but at the same time the watercourses that run through it are deeper. The ATV can 'swim' if it needs to but it is even clumsier in water than a standard design. A well plotted route allows the Travellers to avoid the worst of the deep water areas but the odd crossing will be necessary. A slow and cautious technique is recommended by the manual but often the best results are obtained by hitting the water fast and using residual momentum to assist the crossing. There is a small danger of rolling the vehicle over if it bobs too much or striking an underwater obstacle, so the Travellers may have some choices to make.

It is not the water that causes problems, however. As the Travellers emerge from a river crossing and begin climbing onto dryer land their sensors pick up a large movement nearby. If they are quick on the uptake they might have time to spot an example of the creature designated Apex Four as it begins lumbering at the ATV. Its head is down, suggesting it intends an attack.

The Travellers have time for one short action. Jumping into a seat and grabbing tight hold of the restraints is a viable option; clambering out of a hatch is not. Anyone who asks questions or hesitates will still be doing that when the Apex Four strikes the vehicle. Its charge cannot really damage the ATV but it can get underneath and possibly tip it. To avoid being tipped over the driver of the ATV must make an Average (8+) Drive check. It is not possible to evade this first attack.

If the vehicle is tipped onto its side the Apex Four will climb onto it and start trying to rip its 'belly' open with claws. This will not work but the predator will try hard all the same. Anyone unrestrained in an ATV that goes over sustains 2D damage. This is reduced to 1D if the Traveller is clinging tightly to something. No damage is taken by someone properly strapped into a seat. If the ATV is not tipped over, no damage is taken. The predator will back off after a failed attempt, circling to make another charge at the flank.



The Duel

If the driver of the ATV does not attempt to combat the predator's attempt to get on its flank, it will charge and automatically strike the vehicle. The driver must again make a Drive check to avoid being tipped over. If they can prevent the Apex Four from getting a good position, it will continue to circle. Every 2D minutes, the driver and the creature both make an Average (8+) check. The driver uses Drive skill, with the vehicle's Agility (+1) as a DM but also an additional DM-4 because the ATV is a big target. The creature makes a check with DM+1 for its natural ability at this sort of thing.

Any time the predator makes its check and the driver fails, it can attack the vehicle. An Average (8+) Drive check is required to avoid being tipped over, with the difference in Effect between the two checks as a negative DM for the driver. Sooner or later the ATV will end up on its side unless the Travellers do something.

Dealing with the Apex Four

One option, favoured by Daniel Ryder, is to kill the predator and serve it up at tonight's cookout. This is entirely doable, but anyone dismounting from the vehicle is in real danger of being crushed by the predator or its opponent. Firing from a roof hatch – there are two, one on the cab and one on the rear compartment – imposes DM-2 unless the vehicle is halted. If the predator hits

the ATV whilst someone is half in and half out of a roof hatch they will suffer 1D damage if the vehicle is not tipped. If it is, damage is 3D. The ATV will probably not roll right over but if it did anyone in a roof hatch would have seconds to get inside or well clear in order to avoid being crushed.

Alternatively, the predator can be attacked by personnel using the grav platforms or 'buzzed' by them to harass and confuse it. This will be sufficient to confuse and frustrate the Apex Four, which will retreat after 2D successful 'buzzings'. Each attempt requires an Average (8+) Flyer (grav) check. Success indicates the craft has come close to harass the creature, which does allow it to strike with its tail. This is unlikely to hit but if the predator makes a Very Difficult (12+) Melee (natural) check it will do 2D points damage to the craft and possibly unseat the pilot.

Anyone aboard a craft hit in this manner may fall off. Those properly strapped in will be knocked about and sustain 1D damage. Those who are not must make an Average (8+) Athletics (dexterity) check or fall to the ground, suffering 1D damage for every negative point of Effect. The pilot must also make an additional Average (8+) Flyer (grav) check with the number of points of damage suffered as a negative DM. If this is failed the vehicle will crash.

Whether the predator is killed or driven off, it will be necessary to recover the ATV back to base for repairs and safety checks. This will bring the expedition to a close unless it is for some reason deemed sufficiently important that a replacement vehicle must be provided. This is unlikely, given this was a general-exploration mission dedicated to finding out more about the local conditions. It has already succeeded beyond expectations in that area.

HERDING BIG STOMPS

There are also problems closer to home. It turns out the largest species of local herbivore, referred to as Big Stomps by the Solomani expedition, is migratory. Family groups are wandering into the region of the base camp and causing utter devastation to the local countryside. In addition to a general disregard for the destructive nature of their passing, the creatures will periodically stop and completely wreck an area. Small trees are pushed over, bushy vegetation is stomped flat and the resulting mess is noisily consumed by the whole family.

If the Travellers are not already familiar with the creatures they may mistake the smash-and-devour feeding process for some sort of attack. Even once it is established that the Big Stomp groups are merely feeding, there is still the possibility to consider that they might damage equipment or harm personnel. The creatures are big enough that even if the Travellers take this as an opportunity to restock their larders, killing them all would be wasteful. There are many opponents to such a course of action – eliminating the creatures to protect expedition members or equipment is acceptable and food is necessary but mass slaughter for the sake of convenience is not palatable to most of the expedition.

The only viable alternative is to deflect the advancing family groups or herd them out of the area. This is easier said than done, as they are unconcerned with minor threats that might deter smaller creatures. Loud noises like gunshots generally provoke only a quizzical glance, whilst grav vehicles buzzing about will invite a tail-flick if they come close enough and otherwise be ignored. They will shy away from fire and in the generally damp conditions flares are unlikely to cause a major conflagration. It is possible a fire will spread however, creating additional problems.

Experimentation – which can be hazardous – will indicate that Big Stomps only react to things that cause them pain or to stimuli connected with such an event. Poking one with an improvised cattle prod will get a result and making a noise or flash of light at the same time will cause that particular family group to shy away

from the associated stimulus. Of course, shying away is accompanied by a flick of the tail a lot of the time, which makes any sort of close-range action hazardous. Shooting the creatures will hurt them and has an associated noise, so perhaps someone will come up with the idea of trying this. However, that does mean there will be wounded Big Stomps wandering about, which may be seen as cruel and could trigger aggression.

The best solution seems to be to find a way to cause the Big Stomps mild (by their standards) pain or injury associated with a stimulus like noise. A family will learn to fear something that has hurt one of their number but unless they are very close by – which is unlikely – other groups will have to be ‘educated’ separately. This will require numerous parties all trying to ‘train’ Big Stomps to fear noise or flashes of light, then directing them away from the camp area.

Flyer Down!

The obvious way to herd (or hunt) the Big Stomps is to use grav vehicles. Whatever options the Travellers come up with there will be those who seek alternative options. One or two daredevils have learned that they can jump from a grav platform’s rear deck onto the back of Big Stomp and bash it with something whilst firing a gun in the air the combination of mild discomfort and a scary noise in a place the Big Stomp cannot see works admirably in teaching the creature to fear that noise but there are serious hazards.

The Big Stomp will shudder to try to dislodge the intruder, requiring an Average (8+) Athletics (dexterity) check to avoid falling off. The fall will cause 2D damage, reduced to 1D if a second Athletics check is passed but there is always the chance of being stepped on. The Big Stomp may also flick its bifurcated tail forward, slapping its own back. A Traveller attacked in this way must make a Difficult (10+) Athletics (dexterity) check to evade, suffering 1D damage for each negative point of Effect up to the Big Stomp’s maximum tail damage of 4D. Getting back off the creature requires dropping to the ground – which can be done safely enough but places the Traveller within stomp and lash reach – or scrambling onto a grav platform or into another vehicle from the back of an agitated animal. There are significant hazards here too.

Most of the grav vehicle operators are less reckless than this. Techniques include nudging the creatures with a vehicle – tricky but effective, although the odd tail swipe is a real hazard – or hovering close to the ground in the creature’s path and blocking it until it turns in the right direction. This, too, works, as does a more

direct approach of moving close on foot and banging the creature on the nose with a pole. Big Stomps are far more likely to shy away than attack someone who does this, although there are some close shaves.

At some point, something goes wrong. A tail slap dislodges a lifter or stabiliser and a grav vehicle spins to the ground near a family group of Big Stomps. They are agitated and fearful, and begin closing in on the vehicle. If not driven off they will investigate the downed vehicle by nudging it, which might be enough to cause injuries and damage. This will gradually escalate into an attempt to destroy or 'kill' it with tail strikes and stomps. These creatures are more aggressive than usual due to their fearful state and cannot be easily frightened off. Indeed, the adults will continue to attack the downed vehicle unless killed but the juveniles might be scared off. If one or more can be induced to flee the adults will shepherd the family in the same direction. If the Travellers do not think of this the only viable option is to kill the parents – though, as always, someone may come up with a better idea.

Fear The FAMAT!

One of the ATV drivers comes up with an idea, perhaps based on the earlier incident with the planet's apex predator. The FAMAT-12 ATVs used by the Solomani expedition are big enough to shove a Big Stomp around. A well-manoeuvred ATV could nudge some members of a group in the right direction and keep them going by following closely. The vehicle's horn and external communications loudspeakers might produce enough noise to upset the normally placid Big Stomps, allowing them to be herded as a group.

This is not a bad idea and at first it seems to work. However, the behaviour of the ATV (or ATVs) produces an unintended response. Circling to the flank to try to direct a Big Stomp is a similar movement to that used by an Apex Four before it attacks. The Big Stomps begin to react defensively, turning their tails to the threat and this results in a rather embarrassing period of chasing them around in circles. Eventually, some of them panic and begin fleeing in various directions, with others from distant family groups joining in this rather widely spaced stampede.

Some of the Big Stomps are headed in the direction of the camp. They are large enough to go straight over the earth berm surrounding the camp if they are so inclined. The first priority is to get personnel and fragile equipment – there is quite a lot of that – out of

the animals' path. If they can be turned aside, major problems can be averted but these creatures are now panicked, which will make the task a lot harder.

Options include charging at the Big Stomps with large vehicles, which will make them (literally) turn tail. Once some start heading in different directions others will follow. A significant barrier of fire or a combination of light and noise will also deter and redirect the stampede. Failing that, the only option seems to be to put riflemen on the berm and shoot down any that approach too closely. Killing adult members of a family group probably dooms their offspring as well but there may be no alternative.

This chaotic scene can play out in a variety of ways. The Travellers might simply massacre the Big Stomps or may expend considerable effort in trying to save them. There are no right or wrong answers but there is an important consideration. Some expedition members are likely to try a bit too hard, especially if they want to show off to their rivals, and may place themselves in danger. If there are casualties the Travellers will face criticism – even if the victims went against orders – for putting the welfare of a bunch of animals ahead of their crew. Fair or not, this will cause unrest among the crews.

There is also the consideration of how well the two expeditions work together. At the end of the incident there might be tales of how people from different expeditions worked side-by-side and rescued each other... or the opposite. The situation at the beginning of the incident will determine its outcome to a great extent. That is, if there was a strong 'us and them' feeling in the camp before the stampede then failings to help one another – real or imagined – will be what is remembered. Some crewmembers may actively choose not to assist the other faction and again this will be noticed. On the other hand, if the Travellers fostered cooperation they will reap the benefits in terms of a concerted mutual effort and respect for the deeds of others.

This incident will shape how well the Solomani detachment fits in aboard *Deepnight Revelation* and individuals who stand out here may be selected to join it. The aftermath is likely to be a rather sad one, with Big Stomp juveniles wandering around looking for lost or killed parents and being chased off by other families. Some are reunited and move off, some continue searching whilst making weird, plaintive bellowing sounds. Gradually, the area around the camp returns to normal.

THE UNFORTUNATE CASE OF COMMANDER WHELAN

Commander Whelan has not been reinstated as commanding officer of RSS *Frank Wild*. In all likelihood his ship – assuming the Travellers made repairs to its drive – was borrowed by Captain Bruntein and is currently reconnoitring the crossing route. This leaves Whelan in a strange state of embarrassing limbo. Lieutenant Carstairs is with the reconnaissance expedition, so at least he is spared contact with her but he is in a difficult and unpleasant situation all the same.

Whelan is reluctant to have contact with pretty much anyone but at the same time is desperate to get outside and do something. Being cooped up in a starship for weeks is bad enough; being confined to quarters is much worse. At the same time, interactions with the Solomani expedition's personnel are awkward at best and openly hostile in many cases. Whatever the rights and wrongs of it, Whelan is generally regarded as being at fault for the near-loss of *Frank Wild* and the indirect cause of a mutiny that required intervention by a foreign power.

Eventually, Whelan can stand it no longer and requests a court of inquiry. He has reached the point where the decision as to whether he should be damned or exonerated is less important than ending his period of limbo. Unfortunately, with Captain Bruntein away this leaves the commanding officer of RSS *Leonard Hussey* as the presiding officer. This is not in Whelan's best interests but he insists.

At this point the Travellers receive a visitation from Lieutenant-Commander Edward Haif-al-Tarik, currently senior SolSec officer at the camp and also the political officer of RSS *Leonard Hussey*. Haif-al-Tarik has a proposal. The presiding officer is empowered to select officers of the court as he sees fit but Haif-al-Tarik has persuaded his captain that the Travellers would be a good choice as they will be seen as impartial or – and Haif-al-Tarik is quite candid about this – can be blamed for an unpopular but necessary decision.

The court will comprise a presiding officer and two other members of a tribunal who will jointly decide the fate of the accused. Haif-al-Tarik has to be one of the tribunal members, as the senior SolSec representative. The other can be one of the Travellers. He also needs an advocate for the prosecution and one for the defence, plus as

many expert witnesses or eye-witnesses as the process requires. Haif-al-Tarik is unhappy about using outsiders in this manner but feels that circumstances make it the best option.

The Travellers are expected to carry out their roles to the best of their ability regardless of their own feelings on the matter. The tribunal is empowered to impose any penalty whatsoever upon the accused and must consider the needs of the mission as well as the letter of regulations and considerations of guilt and innocence. For example, a court of this type has upon occasion stripped a captain of their rank or even condemned them to life imprisonment despite a successful defence, because doing otherwise might set a precedent that could lead to indiscipline. All involved are required to swear to uphold 'the good of the Solomani Confederation and her Navy' above all else in these proceedings. The Travellers might find this weird but they are being asked to swear upon their honour as fellow starfarers – this could be seen as quite an honour by those inclined that way or an opportunity for skulduggery by others.

Roles in the Inquiry

Each official has a specific role to play:

Predicting Officer: The presiding officer can appoint and dismiss officials, which means the Travellers will have to be careful when disagreeing with him. He has one of three votes when deciding whether to impose a penalty or when determining guilt. This post is held by Commander Willard Teller. Teller is looking for an outcome that benefits his own career and makes him look good, rather than one that benefits the mission. He will thus vote politically and can be persuaded by self-interest providing it is done in a roundabout manner. Looking biased would be bad for him.

SolSec Representative: A representative of Solomani Security is required in these circumstances. Edward Haif-al-Tarik will fulfil this role. He is primarily concerned with the security of the expedition and will push for an outcome that does not encourage dereliction of duty or internal dissent. Exactly what this might be is as yet an open question and he can be persuaded by evidence or arguments about the good of the mission.

Tribunal Panel Member: This role is fulfilled by one of the Travellers. They can vote however they think best.

Advocate for the Prosecution: This role is fulfilled by one of the Travellers. Their job is to present the grounds for penalising Commander Whelan. This is based on a series of significant errors of judgement in the weeks running

up to the misjump and the fact that the crew did not carry out proper maintenance or follow procedures correctly. It was the captain's duty to ensure this did not happen and Whelan failed at it. This is not in dispute; the question is whether these failures were excusable or not. If this Traveller does an obviously weak job the proceedings will be cast into disrepute. Indeed, the advocate for the prosecution has a duty to Whelan to go after him as hard as possible. If the result is exoneration despite the advocate's best efforts, the proceedings are more likely to be seen as legitimate.

Advocate for the Defence: This role is fulfilled by one of the Travellers. Their job is to defend Whelan's actions or determine that matters were the fault of someone else. Mitigation is also an option; accepting that Whelan did not meet the requirements of his post but offering reasons why this was not really his fault. As with the other advocate, the advocate for the defence has a duty to try as hard as possible – a prosecution that succeeds despite a tough defence is more likely to stand up to scrutiny than one that is simply allowed to succeed.

Witnesses: Any of the Travellers can offer their thoughts on Whelan's conduct and failings, and advise on a penalty or verdict. The final decision rests with the tribunal however.

Playing out the Inquiry

The inquiry takes a standard form. After opening comments from the presiding officer the prosecution presents its case and calls any witnesses it feels appropriate. The defence may cross-examine them, after which the defence presents its case and its witnesses. The tribunal then debates the matter and makes a decision by majority vote.

The Travellers should be encouraged to roleplay their testimony and any courtroom theatrics they wish to engage in. The prosecution's case is pretty solid – Whelan was derelict in his duty in multiple ways – and they have numerous witnesses among the crew who can attest to failings on his part. Likewise, the defence has numerous witnesses who will say Whelan was a good captain who tried his best. Eventually he exhausted himself trying to keep the ship going. He could be presented as a casualty rather than a criminal, someone who sacrificed his mental health for the good of others. A crewmember cannot be blamed for failing to carry out a task due to debilitating physical injury, so surely an officer who is pushed beyond his ability to function cannot be entirely to blame? After all, there were others who could and should have supported him but instead goofed off when supervision was not in place.

There is also the question of what is good for the expedition and for Whelan. He is not in a fit state to resume command and the 'mental health collapse' defence – whilst valid – opens the door for less scrupulous personnel to use it as an excuse. This would be detrimental to discipline, which might endanger the whole mission. Perhaps Whelan should be made an example to deter others; an unfortunate sacrifice on the altar of necessity.

There are three key questions to be answered here:

- Was Commander Whelan guilty of any failure to discharge his duties?
- Are there strong mitigating factors?
- What penalty or action should be imposed upon Commander Whelan?

The outcome of the inquiry depends ultimately upon the Travellers. Unless they present a startlingly strong case for the defence, the answer to the first question is likely to be 'yes' from both Haif-al-Tarik and Teller, making the Travellers' opinion moot. The second question is more open. Haif-al-Tarik thinks there were significant mitigating factors and will vote 'yes' unless the Travellers present a very strong case for the prosecution. Teller, on the other hand, is inclined to vote 'no' – not least because he wants to look like a tough disciplinarian with 'the good of the expedition' as his property. He can be persuaded by a strong argument and the Traveller on the tribunal can vote as they please.

In all probability the tribunal will decide that Whelan is responsible for at least some dereliction of duty but there were mitigating factors. This will be the outcome if the Travellers do not take part. The third question is open to discussion and the Travellers can all offer their own opinions. Once a proposed course of action is played out, the tribunal votes on whether to implement it. If passed, this is what happens. If not, a new course of action must be proposed.

The most likely outcome, assuming the Travellers do not intervene and the verdict is as above, is that Whelan's rank and status are to be suspended pending a full inquiry when the expedition returns to Charted Space. He can be reinstated at the discretion of the expedition's commanding officer but this is unlikely. He is to be monitored to assess his suitability for reinstatement or assignment to a new role. The tribunal concludes that Whelan's situation was unfortunate rather than wilful and whilst he did fail in significant ways this was never his intent. It is a small comfort to be labelled 'not good enough' rather than 'wilfully neglectful of duty' but the consequences are less.

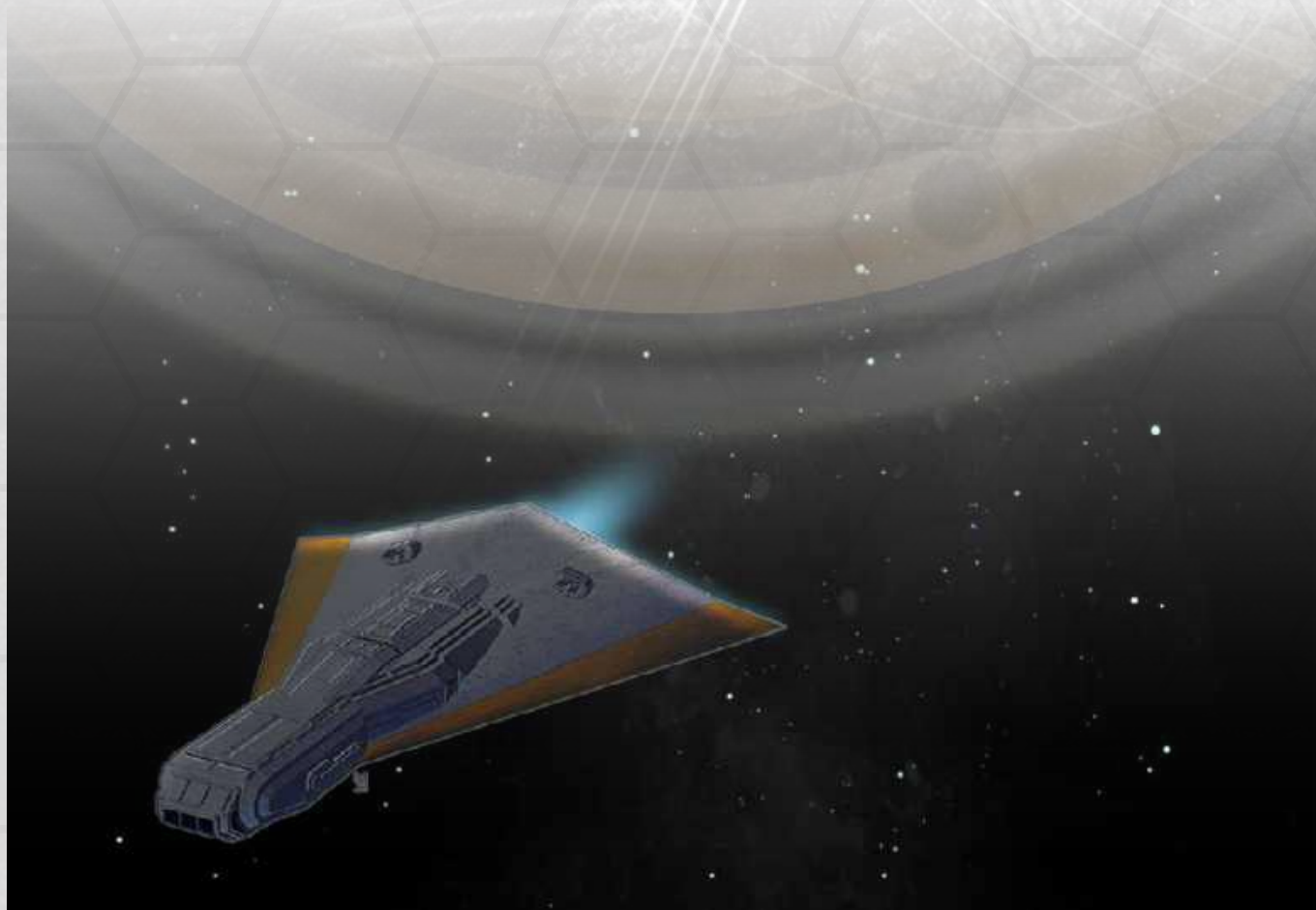
Whelan's career as a starship captain is over, it seems. Even if he is reinstated by Bruntein he will never command another ship once he reaches Charted Space. He may be shuffled off to a training role or given a desk job but he has failed as a captain. Worst of all – to him at least – he will be pitied as someone who was too weak for the job rather than incapable of doing it. It could have been very different with a better executive officer but he was assigned for connections rather than competence. Whelan genuinely worries about the fate of his crew under such a leader and agrees with Carstairs that he was not fit for command.

Whelan is actually relieved by the verdict, among other emotions. He is out from the crushing weight of responsibility and at least he knows his fate. For a day or two he cheerfully does odd jobs around the camp and some of the crew seem to warm to him. However, he is tainted by his failure and the situation is awkward. Whether or not he is put forward for the Solomani detachment when Bruntein returns, Whelan will eventually approach the Travellers and offer his services as a skilled pilot and bridge watchstander. At this point he would take any role aboard *Deepnight Revelation*, just for the sake of doing something worthwhile.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

In preparation for the return of the reconnaissance mission, *Deepnight Revelation* needs to be re-provisioned and prepared. Preparations in this case include some downtime for everyone, since a rested crew is essential to the task ahead. Assuming the Travellers take the trouble to make a plan, most of what they need is readily available. They can begin their final transit to Terminus Point with a full set of supplies and a well-rested crew.

Whether or not provisioning goes well, what the Travellers have when they leave Point Amundsen is what they have at Terminus Point. Anything forgotten now, or unavailable, they will have to do without. The last few days on Four are likely to be a flurry of activity followed by a grand ready-to-proceed celebration. Perhaps the Travellers will hold a ceremony commemorating those who fell along the way and the adventures they have had to reach this point. Whatever they do, the Referee should allow the Travellers to make 'a moment' of this departure. It is the last of the waypoints; their next significant destination is Terminus Point.



TO TERMINUS POINT

Eventually the time has come to take the plunge... or not. If the Travellers have made friends – or even just cordial rivals – there will be goodbyes to be said. The last days on Four might be remembered as fondly as other partings, some of them years ago now. The crossing is dangerous and everyone knows the Travellers might not come back. If things have gone well they know they are leaving behind a legacy; someone will get home to Charted Space and tell their tale. If not, perhaps it is better their story remains untold. Either way it is time to make the crossing.

Once Travellers make the first jump out from Point Amundsen into the Great Rift, this adventure is over and *Terminus Point* has begun. This day has been long in coming but the Travellers are finally approaching their destination. If members of the Solomani expedition are aboard *Deepnight Revelation* this makes no real difference to the storyline presented in *Terminus Point*, although additional dimensions might be added by the interplay between different groups or their unique capabilities.

If the campaign was been played without the expansion books or the journey was glossed over, *Deepnight Revelation* might begin this final transit in factory condition with the original crew aboard. On the other hand, the Travellers might be holding a broken ship together with their fingernails and leading a crew of Alikeia, Droyne, humans from the Far Side of Nowhere, Myself and random individuals picked up in adventures the Referee created. If so, the Travellers may wish to consider this:

If the memorials at VS-X were interpreted correctly, this is as far as Oyskrusk got. His people were the Ancients, who moved worlds when it suited them and yet the Travellers have managed to make the same voyage in a primitive-by-comparison vessel. Oyskrusk hoped others would follow and they did. Three hundred thousand years later perhaps but they came. Did Oyskrusk succeed or fail? Perhaps the Travellers will find out at Terminus Point. If he did not succeed then the Travellers have a chance to surpass the Ancients. There is an important truth here if they look for it – greatness is not about creating technological marvels; it is about deeds. In that context the Travellers have achieved a level of greatness that exceeds that of

Oyskrusk, for all his self-aggrandising monuments, for the Travellers have done more with less. They have faced greater dangers and overcome more difficult challenges, and if their final triumph is built upon the work of Oyskrusk they will have both honoured and surpassed him.

THE SOLOMANI DETACHMENT

In order to fulfil their mission the Solomani expedition needs to send researchers to Terminus Point. The intent is that these will collect their data and conduct experiments, then return to their own ships for the voyage home. Events at Terminus Point may make this impossible but the Solomani detachment is working on the assumption that their time aboard *Deepnight Revelation* is temporary. This, and the general antipathy between the Imperium and the Solomani Confederation, means that relations will be formal and polite at best unless the Travellers work at integrating the Solomani personnel.

However, the Solomani are not ‘enemies within’; they are fellow starfarers with a similar mission, trying to get their own jobs done under difficult circumstances. Most have accepted that cooperating with the Imperials is the best way to accomplish what they came for whilst reducing the risks and will go along with whatever the Travellers are doing without complaint. If extreme measures are taken, such as plunging headlong into a gravitational anomaly, the Solomani will protest unless they have confidence in the Travellers’ leadership. They will also expect to be consulted on matters concerning the mission and given the opportunity to send a couple of people on a planetside expedition or other interesting undertakings.

The majority of the detachment are naval personnel with some scientific training, who for the most part have a habit of letting their officers and political leaders deal with ‘big picture’ matters like how to go about interacting with foreigners. Thus the detachment will follow the lead of their officers or any SolSec personnel assigned and do their best to get along with the Travellers and their crew. In some cases this is due to mutual respect and even burgeoning friendship; in



others it is because the detachment has been ordered to make the arrangement work and they know they will be evaluated when they get back.

The Solomani detachment is therefore harder to alienate than might be expected but if mistreated they may begin to act against the Travellers as an organised unit. Much depends on how the Travellers treat the detachment and how carefully they are selected. Some personnel are more or less certain to be sent and the Travellers will have to live with it. Three such personalities are detailed in the *Allies and Opponents* chapter. The rest will be assigned by the Solomani expedition's leaders but the Travellers can make requests that will generally be honoured. Their best option is to observe the Solomani personnel whilst they are at Four and balance taking those with the best mix of skills against the need to ensure the detachment can function without undue friction – internally and externally. Personnel selection may also be important if the Travellers' expedition has suffered casualties among critical personnel.

THOSE LEFT BEHIND

If the Travellers have teamed up with the Solomani – or someone else they met during their adventures – they are leaving behind the possibility for spinoff adventures. The most obvious is the continued exploration of Four whilst those left there wait for the return of the Travellers. If they do come back from Terminus point in a reasonable time frame, adventures in the Voidshore

and Far Side of Nowhere regions can continue aboard *Deepnight Revelation*. The return journey – whether by the same route or some entirely different one – is likely to be filled with many more adventures.

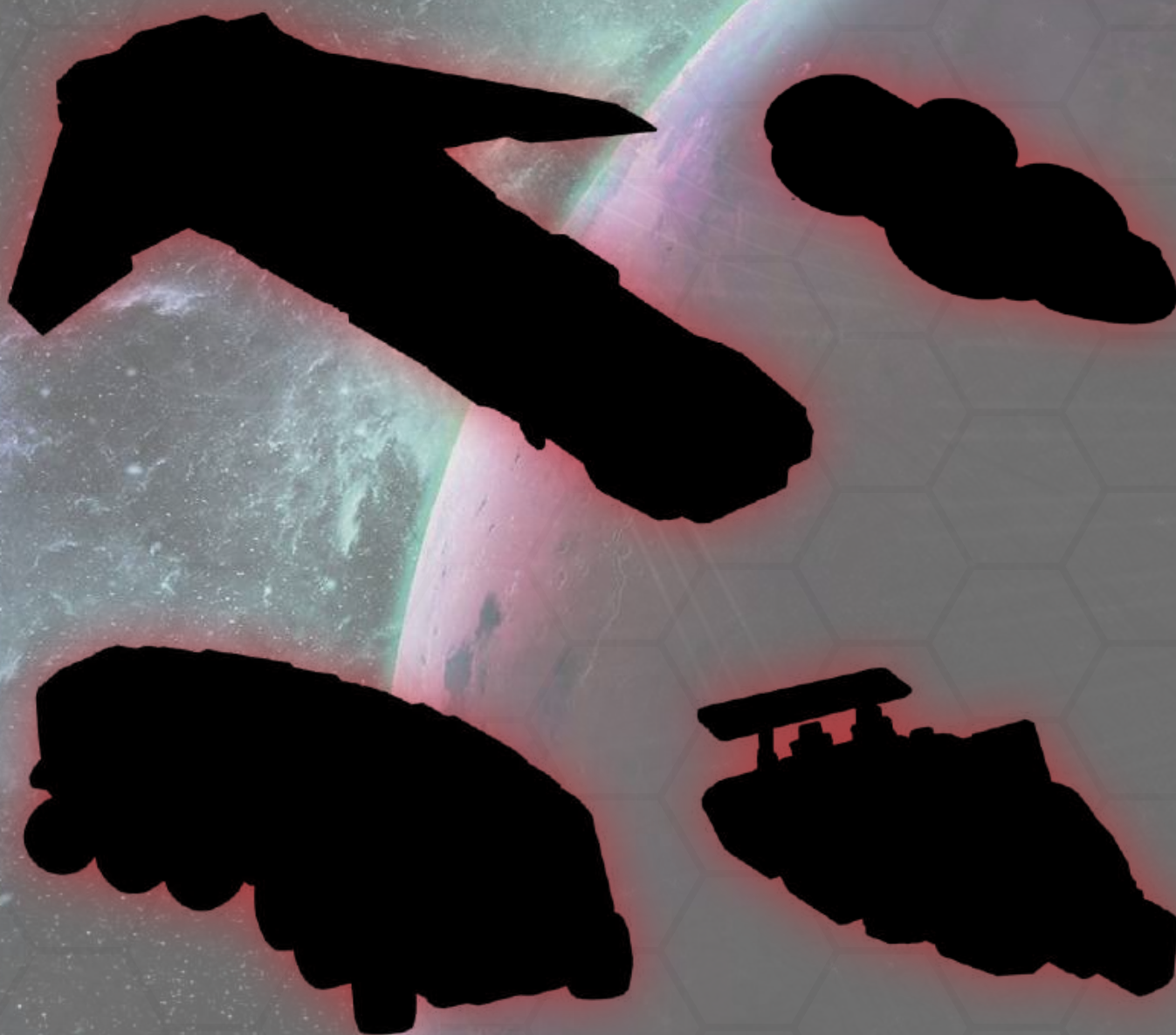
If *Deepnight Revelation* does not return, a follow-up mission might be sent aboard one of the Solomani ships. The chances of success are not high but the fate of the Travellers might be discerned and word of their valiant attempt carried home. It would also be possible to have further adventures aboard these ships, perhaps returning to the Far Side of Nowhere. This would certainly interest the Solomani, who have a lot in common with those who settled this region. Even if the ships just turn and head for home the journey will be quite an undertaking and could lead to an entire new campaign.

If the Travellers want to continue adventuring in the Far Side of Nowhere and Voidshore regions there are other possibilities. A small group might have chosen to stay behind when *Deepnight Revelation* passed through the Far Side of Nowhere or new Travellers might be generated for a campaign set there. Alternatively, the Referee may recall that it was planned to send other ships after *Deepnight Revelation*. These will have their own stories and might follow the trail of the Travellers just as they followed Oyskrusk. In short, the campaign is moving to its climax but even if the Travellers do not return from Terminus Point their voyage to reach it has created a great many opportunities to start telling new stories and developing a wholly new campaign.

C H A P T E R F O U R

SPACECRAFT & VEHICLES

The most likely starfaring vessels to be encountered in Voidshore belong to the Biologicals and the Solomani expedition. The latter are conventional starships, albeit built to a different design philosophy to *Deepnight Revelation*.



EXCURSION BAY

An excursion bay is designed to allow safe access to the external environment, whether that is space, an airless world's surface or the parking area of a starport. The bay is designed for decontamination, maintenance and preparation of equipment as well as access to the ship and has security features making it suitable for commercial ships as well as exploration vessels. A personnel excursion bay has a small workshop area for maintenance of vacc suits and hostile environment gear, whilst a vehicular excursion bay includes the same but adds vehicle maintenance facilities as well.

An excursion bay uses an airlocked entrance/exit point, which is fitted with basic weapon scanners and analysis equipment that can spot most harmful organisms or substances. The airlocked area can be decontaminated in a routine manner but also has an emergency purge facility. Some versions of the excursion bay, designed to be used in an extreme-hazard environment, permit cryogenic flooding, radiation sterilisation and thermal destruction of anything within the airlocked area. This feature is not normally fitted to prevent the system being used as a death trap by unscrupulous operators. The inner area can also be decontaminated, either along with the airlock or separately. Vehicles carried in an excursion bay consume tonnage based on their Shipping value.

Excursion bays have an Access and Support rating. One point of Access or Support translates to a single person in a hostile environment suit or combat armour or two in

ordinary vacc suits. Thus an excursion bay with Access 4 can allow up to eight vacc-suited personnel access or two in hostile environment suits and four in vacc suits, or any combination thereof. Support indicates the number of sets of equipment that can be cared for and assumes space for one technician to work for every four points of Support.

Vehicular excursion bays can support and maintain a tonnage of vehicles up to their Support rating and accommodate a vehicle up to its Access rating in tons. A vehicular excursion bay can, of course, deploy personnel through its airlock but is not optimised to maintain their equipment. Additional vehicles can be stowed in cargo space set up as garages, accessing the ship through the excursion bay.

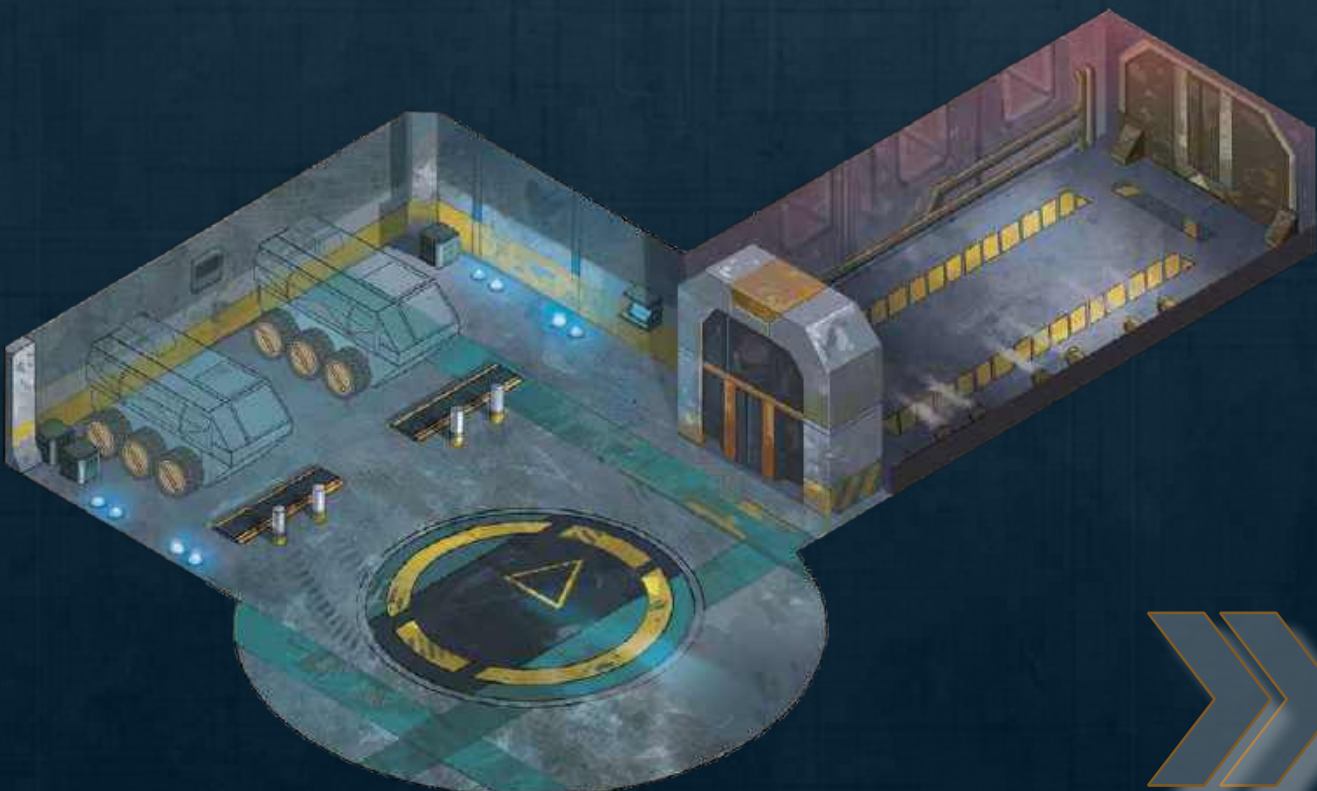
A personnel excursion bay consumes a minimum of four tons. This gives Access 2 and Support 4. Each additional ton can be used to add Access +1 Support +2. A personnel excursion bay costs MCr0.5 per ton.

A vehicular excursion bay consumes a minimum of 12 tons. This gives Access 4 and Support 8. Adding Access +1 or Support +2 points consumes an additional two tons. A vehicular excursion bay costs MCr0.75 per ton.



STANDARD EXCURSION BAYS

Feature	Access	Support	Tonnage	Cost (MCr)	Notes
Personnel Excursion Bay, Small	2	4	4	2	Common on small mining and scientific ships, allows support and maintenance of four hostile environment or salvage rigs.
Personnel Excursion Bay, Large	4	12	10	5	A large bay suitable for very bulky equipment or teams of hostile-environment operators.
Vehicular Excursion Bay, Minimal	4	8	12	9	The archetypical 'air/raft bay' capable of supporting two small grav vehicles and launching them one at a time.
Vehicular Excursion Bay, Multiple-Access	12	12	28	21	Typically used for security rather than hostile environments, the bay can deliver four standard ground cars at the same time and house them in a workshop/garage. Allows a motorcade to deploy simultaneously, reducing the chance of an isolated vehicle being compromised.
Vehicular Access Bay, Large	10	30	35	26.25	A large bay capable of holding 30 tons of ground vehicles – 3 standard ATVs, 7 air/rafts or some other combination of vehicles – and granting access to 10 tons of vehicles at a time. This could be two air/rafts or one ATV or some other combination.
Extreme Hazard Features	—	—	+10%	x3	Extreme hazard protection increases the bulk of the bay a little and pushes the price up enormously.



TENZING EXPLORATION VESSEL

The *Tenzing* class is named for those who supported more famous explorers, such as the navigators and engineers of famous exploration ships or – as is the case with the class namesake – local experts and guides who facilitated famous exploits but often received little credit. The *Tenzing* was designed to be the equivalent of the sailing caravel in the great days of Terran exploration; easy for a small crew to handle but sufficient to undertake a lengthy cruise. The voyage to the Voidshore is far more than the class was ever expected to undertake but the expedition's *Tenzings* have held up well for the most part.

The *Tenzing* is built on a custom 2,000-ton hull intended to be able to make repeated planetary landings and act as a mobile exploration base. The space saved by not carrying hangars full of craft was considered extremely valuable in such a small vessel. Overall hull form is a 'flared cylinder' shape not dissimilar to some other Solomani designs. Most systems are contained within the main cylinder, with the wide aft section containing jump drive fuel. The main cylinder is distinctly divided, with the upper deck reserved for ship operations and the lower deck set up in a manner that allows it to be readily customised.

The aft part of the main hull is largely taken up with a four-parsec jump drive and a surprisingly modest power plant. The *Tenzing* can operate in-system using its power plant but requires battery power to keep all systems running whilst charging the jump drive. It is common to shut down the manoeuvre drive and observe strict power-regulation measures during the pre-jump sequence, making this one of the few Solomani designs whose crews may have to observe the old tradition of 'jump dimming'.

Crew accommodation and associated systems are located amidships, with a command area immediately forward of them. This contains briefing rooms, training facilities and the main computer core but not the bridge; that is located in a dorsal hump that also contains the drone handing rooms and the missile system. Forward in the main cylinder is the scientific suite, with laboratories and operating stations for major instruments such as the life and deep penetration scanners. A curious feature of the *Tenzing* is the emergency conning position, in the form of a two-seat cockpit protruding from the front face of the upper deck.

At the fore end of the lower deck is an extensive excursion suite, with personnel and vehicle access. The *Tenzing* has capacity for up to nine standard ATVs or an array of smaller vehicles and usually carries significant hostile-environment gear. Aft of the vehicle bays are crew recreation areas, a configurable biosphere, the small cargo hold and chambers containing electronic systems that require little maintenance. As is not uncommon on ships of this type, crew recreation areas are designed to be repurposed as additional working spaces when necessary.

Although armed, the *Tenzing* was never envisaged as a warship. Nonetheless, its lightly armoured hull and main battery of particle barbettes does enable it to be used as a high-jump patrol vessel for regions of sparse star systems. In addition to two missile barbettes, which are intended as probe launchers more than weapon systems, the ship mounts a main battery of four particle barbettes, all on the dorsal surface aft of the bridge and eight dual laser turrets positioned at intervals across the hull.

The *Tenzing* can carry enough personnel to fill its 'textbook' roster without using double-occupancy in its crew cabins but adding mission specialist personnel pushes this limit. This is rarely a problem, as exploration ships are unlikely to need a full-time complement of gunners. Indeed, it is rare to encounter a *Tenzing* with more than one or two gunnery personnel. At need, multi-skilled personnel can man the weapons, carrying out their normal duties the rest of the time. Likewise, the engineering workload is normally handled by six full-time engineering and maintenance personnel, with additional personnel re-tasked when needed. Thus the typical crew of a *Tenzing* looks nothing like its 'paper' complement.

A typical exploration crew consists of a few high-capability experts plus a much larger number of multi-skilled personnel. Nominal complement is around 27, plus mission specialists and their support personnel. However, most mission support personnel and some specialists are trained to handle shipboard tasks as well, creating a multi-skilled crew that can swap personnel between roles. Other than some high-end scientists, nobody serves aboard an exploration ship without being qualified to fulfil some important shipboard role to at least a basic level. Likewise, backup personnel are distributed among the crew; whilst there is a senior astrogator aboard, there will be at least two other people capable of calculating a jump plot.

EXPLORATION VESSEL

TENZIG CLASS

TL14		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	2,000 tons, Streamlined	—	120
Armour	Bonded Superdense, Armour: 2	32	16
M-Drive	Thrust 2	40	80
Jump Drive	Jump 4 (advanced, energy efficient)	205	338.25
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 1,020	68	68
	High Efficiency Batteries (TL12), Power 1,500	25	5
Fuel Tanks	J-4, 8 weeks of operation	815	—
Bridge	Holographic Controls	40	12.5
	Dual Cockpit	2.5	0.015
Computer	Core/90	—	120
Sensors	Improved, Extended Arrays	9	12.9
	Enhanced Signal Processing	2	8
	Life Scanner	1	2
	Life Scanner Analysis Suite	1	4
	Mineral Detection Suite	—	5
	Deep Penetration Scanner	10	10
Weapons	Missile Barbettes x2	10	8
	Particle Barbettes x4	20	32
	Dual Turrets (pulse laser) x8	8	20
	Point Defence Type III	20	20
	Nuclear Dampers x2	20	20
Ammunition	Missile Storage (120 missiles)	10	—
Systems	Fuel Processor (500 tons/day)	25	1.25
	Fuel Scoop	—	—
	Advanced Probe Drones	20	16
	Repair Drones	20	4
	Sensor Stations x4	4	2
	Armouries x2	2	0.5
	Brig	4	0.25
	Medical Bays x2	8	15
	Workshop	6	0.9
	UNREP System (100 tons/hour)	5	2.5
	Training Facilities x6	12	2.4
	Briefing Room	4	0.5
	Library	4	4
TOTAL: MCr 1064.84			

EXPLORATION VESSEL

TENZIG CLASS

TL14		TONS	COST (MCr)
Systems	Biosphere	20	4
	Multi-Environment Space (20 tons)	21	0.5
	Laboratory	24	6
	Personnel Excursion Bay, Large (extreme hazard)	11	16.5
	Vehicle Excursion Bay (extreme hazard)	38.5	28.875
	Additional Vehicle Garage	60	—
Staterooms	Standard x34	136	17
Common Areas		120	12
Software	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Virtual Crew/1	—	5
	Virtual Gunner/1	—	5
	Auto-Repair/2	—	20
	Library	—	—
Cargo		110	—
TOTAL: MCr 1064.84			



800

HULL POINTS

TENZIG EXPLORATION VESSEL

CREW HIERARCHY



Captain

Political Officer

Executive Officer

Astrogator

Flight Group (3 Personnel)

Engineering Officer

3 Engineers

Engineering and Technical Group
(6 Personnel)

Deck Officer

Gunnery Officer

Medical Officer

Deck Group (8 Personnel)

Senior Mission Specialist

Mission Specialists (varies)

Mission Support Personnel (varies)

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOT,
ASTROGATOR, ENGINEERS
X10, MAINTENANCE X2,
MEDIC, GUNNERS X17,
ADMINISTRATORS X2,
OFFICERS X2

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr88736/month

• • • • •

PURCHASE COST

MCr1064.84

POWER REQUIREMENTS

400

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

400

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

600

JUMP DRIVE

12

SENSORS

118

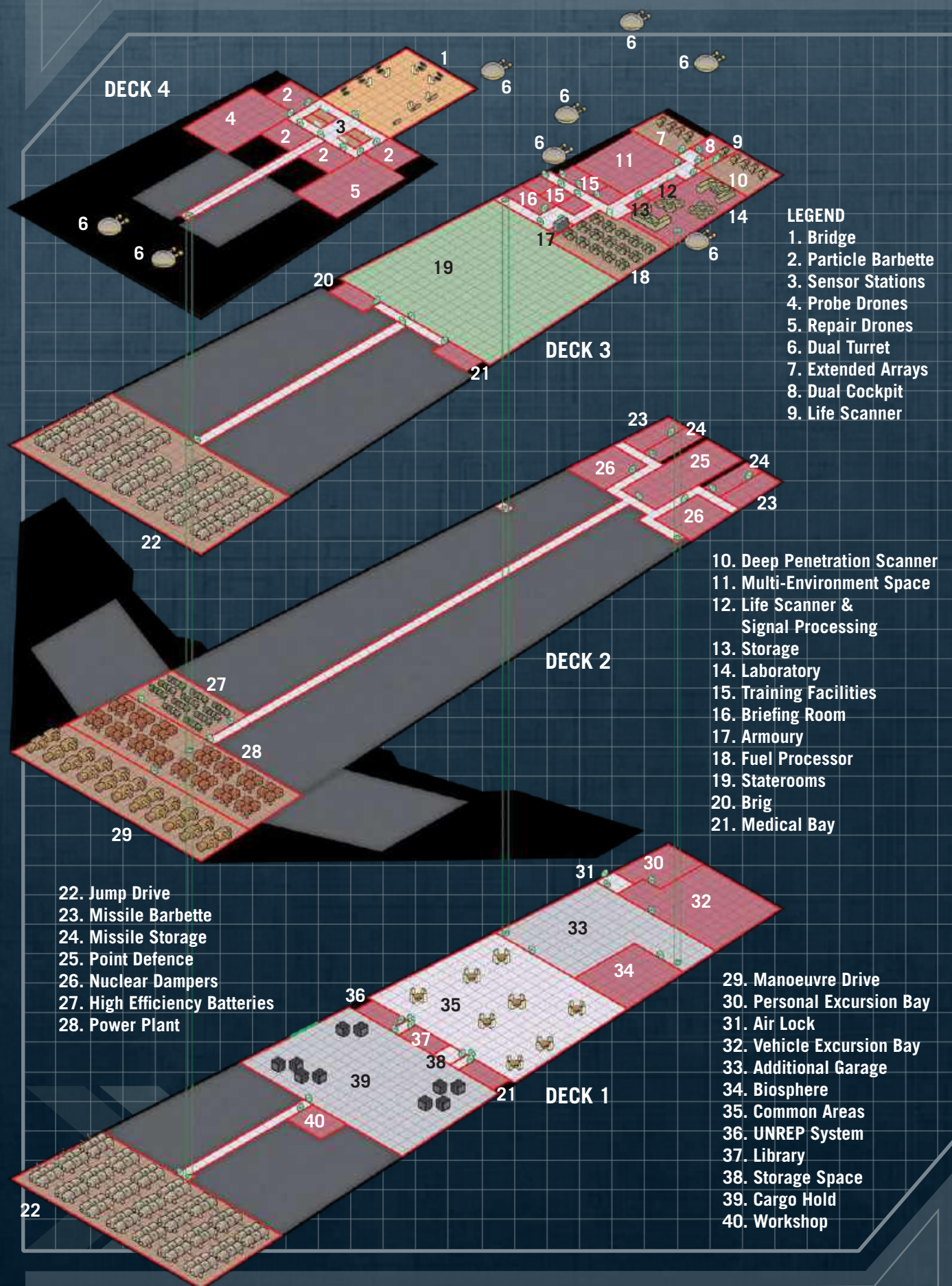
WEAPONS

25

FUEL PROCESSOR

52

SYSTEMS



UMTYATHO DROYNE SPACECRAFT

The *Umt'yatho* type is based on a design used in the Dual Alliance, although advances in technology there have supplanted it with more capable variants. Built at TL10, the *Umt'yatho* is a small utility vessel typically used for in-system errands and interface work. It is constructed on a similar hull form to other ships originating in the Dual Alliance, with a central cylindrical hull and four ovoid structures located in pairs one-quarter and three-quarters along the main hull. On some vessels these are large enough to contain significant amounts of the ship's internal systems but the *Umt'yatho* type is small. Its ovoids contain a small utility space at lower-deck level, electronics and instrumentation above and the vessel's landing feet below.

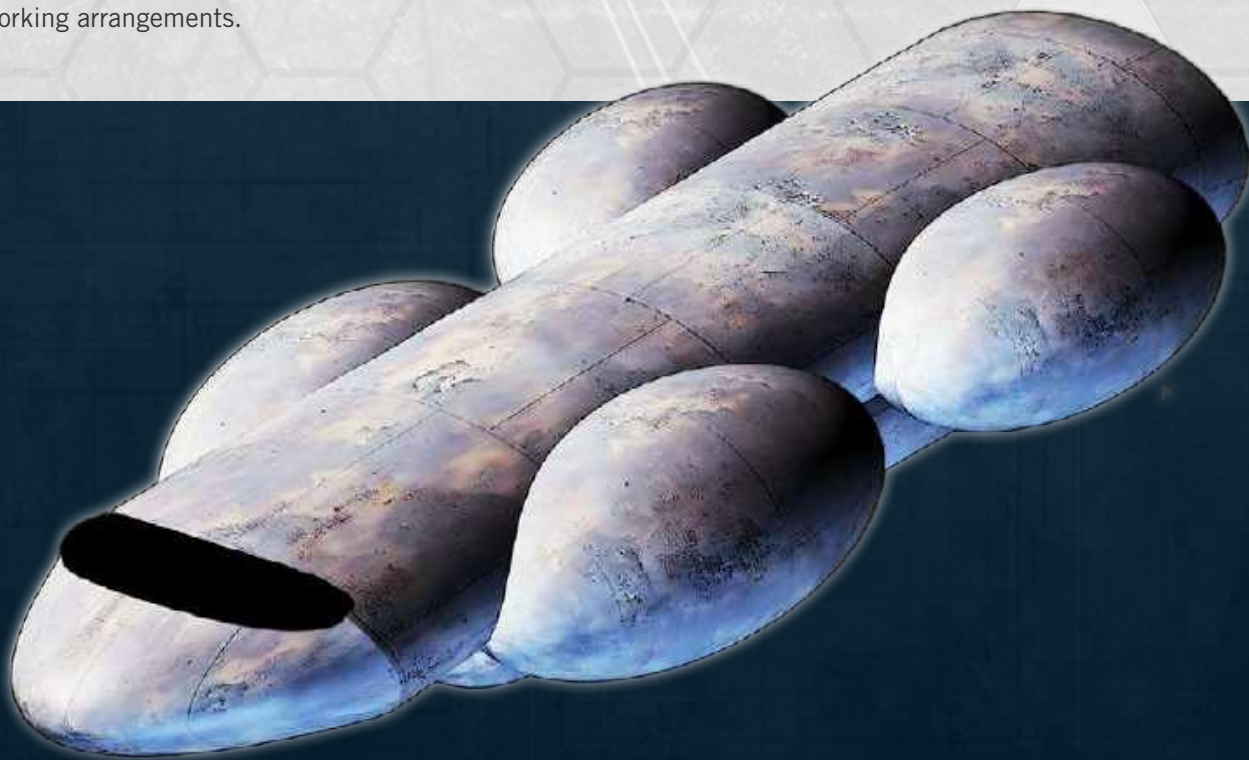
The main hull consists of a 200-ton cylinder, laid out as a single deck, with a 100-ton modular section slung underneath. The lower surface of this segment sits just slightly above the ground when landing feet are deployed and on most vessels it is used as an easily accessible cargo area. However, the modular space can be used for all manner of other tasks.

The main deck has a 56-ton configurable area directly above the modular segment, which is generally used for additional cargo. It can be set up as a laboratory, additional working space, passenger accommodation or almost any other configuration. *Umt'yatho* type vessels serving as the personal transport of a leader in Dual Alliance space sometimes fit a jump drive in this area, with the modular section devoted to the leader's living and working arrangements.

Control spaces are located forward, with a 'leader of the craft' chamber immediately aft of the bridge. To an outsider this space resembles a luxurious common area/library with a large amount of repeater screens and specialised readouts. Here, the commander can consult technical data and/or religious texts whilst directing the actions of the craft's flight crew.

Living arrangements are obviously for Droyne, with everything shaped and sized accordingly. The living area has the equivalent of six staterooms and an associated common space but these are not the usual cabins used by humans. Accommodation is more of an open-plan space with areas designated for sleeping and recreation. Ships built in the Dual Alliance have a more typical arrangement of full enclosed cabins and common spaces.

The drive and power chamber is aft, along with a multipurpose workshop and a multi-environment space that can be used for carrying specialist cargoes or for recreational purposes. These craft fulfil a wide range of roles, from prospecting in the outsystem to ferrying delicate goods down from orbit. Examples have been fitted with weapons and used by the Dual Alliance as security craft but there is no evidence of this practice at Draytsirv.



DROYNE SPACECRAFT

UMTYATHO TYPE

TL10		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	300 tons, Close Structure	—	13.5
	Modular Hull (100 tons)	—	4.5
M-Drive	Thrust 3	9	18
Power Plant	Fusion (TL8), Power 165	11	11
Fuel Tanks	4 weeks of operation	1.1	—
Bridge		20	1.5
Computer	Computer/10	—	0.16
Sensors	Military Grade	2	4.1
Systems	Cargo Crane	3	3
	Probe Drones x25	5	2.5
	Grappling Arms x2	4	2
	Multi-Environment Space (20 tons)	21	0.5
	Fuel Scoop	—	1
	Library	4	4
	Workshops x2	12	0.3
	UNREP System (60 tons/hour)	3	1.5
Staterooms	Standard x6	24	3
Common Areas		24	2.4
Software	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Library	—	—
Cargo		156.9	—
TOTAL: MCr 72.96			

CREW

PILOT,
ENGINEER

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST
Cr6080/month
• • • • •

PURCHASE COST
MCr72.96

POWER REQUIREMENTS

90

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

60

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

4

SYSTEMS

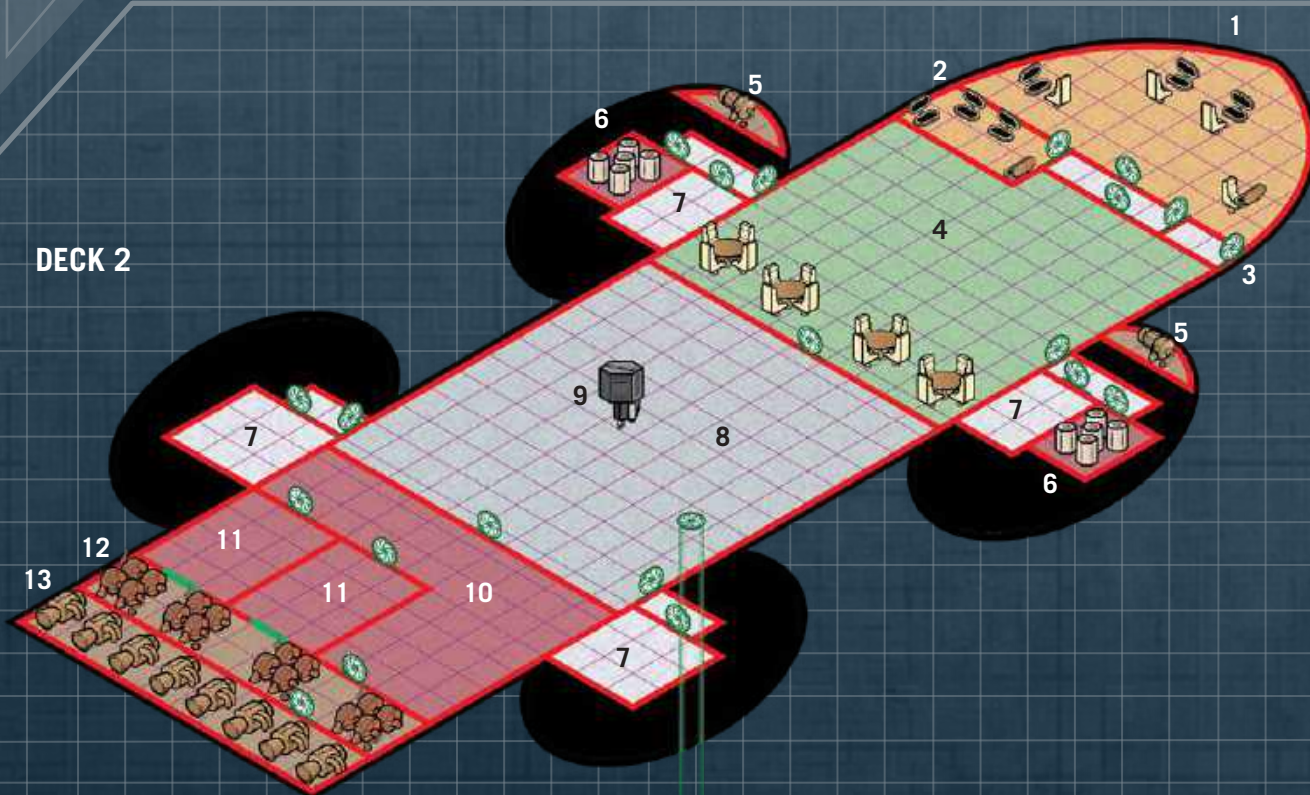
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SENSORS

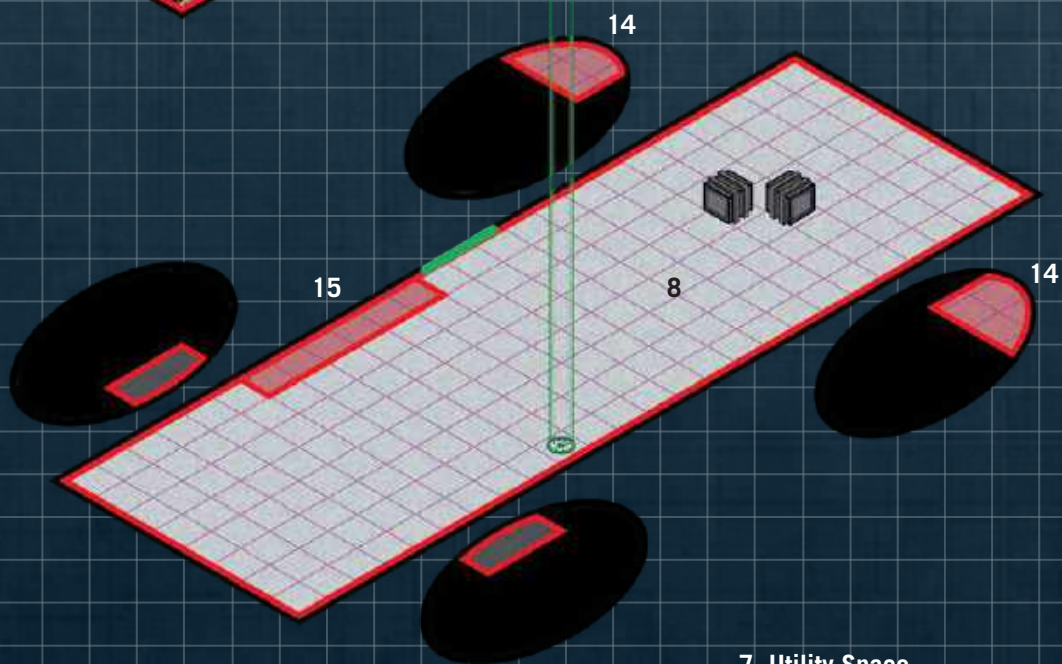
132

HULL POINTS

DECK 2



DECK 1



LEGEND

- 1. Bridge
- 2. Library
- 3. Air Lock
- 4. Living Space & Common Areas
- 5. Sensors
- 6. Probe Drones

- 7. Utility Space
- 8. Carg Hold
- 9. Cargo Crane
- 10. Multi-Environment Space
- 11. Workshop
- 12. Power Plant
- 13. Manoeuvre Drive
- 14. Grappling Arm
- 15. UNREP System

SOLOMANI FAMAT-12 ATV

The FAMAT-12 is the largest chassis in the family of All-Terrain series. The design concept dates back centuries, to a requirement for a standardised 'family' of vehicles with interchangeable components and standardised controls. The FAMAT-12 is typically outfitted as an exploration or 'frontier utility' vehicle, serving as a platform for all manner of work with prospecting and mineral-resource companies, colonial expeditions and the like. It is also pressed into service as a security vehicle and can sometimes be found at backwater starports where an environmentally controlled platform is necessary to security operations. The FAMAT-12 is also used, in modified form, as a weapons carrier or personnel transport by some mercenary units. It is built under license on a great many Solomani worlds and has been widely copied – usually without license – elsewhere.

Rather than the typical single-hull system used by most all-terrain vehicles the FAMAT-12 is built in two sections joined by a flexible connector. Each section has six powered and independently steerable wheels, making the FAMAT-12 extremely manoeuvrable for its size but tricky to drive without full automated assistance. Even then, the driver has to remain aware of where the two parts of the vehicle are going; it is quite possible to jam a FAMAT-12 against obstacles a conventional vehicle would not strike.

The two-section design has many advantages. A FAMAT-12 can quickly be repurposed by replacing the rear section and since the two parts can be sealed off from one another a puncture in one – perhaps from a micrometeorite strike – will not depressurise the whole vehicle. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find prospectors working out of a depressurised rear section whilst the 'drive crew' operate in a shirtsleeves environment in the forward compartment.

The hull is rugged and lightly armoured. As standard, this is primarily to provide protection against micrometeorites and the general abuse these vehicles suffer. FAMAT-12 vehicles intended for security operations are often up-armoured, with panels and inserts added on the sides and protection increased for windscreens and vision ports. Armour from the roof can be moved to other locations in a matter of hours using brackets and standard-sized panels or additional panels can be added whilst retaining some or all of the heavy top cover.

The FAMAT-12s used by the Solomani expedition have a standard configuration forward section and a rear section set up for exploration-related tasks. The forward section contains driving and co-driving positions, with two additional crew or passenger seats behind them. These can be rotated to face in any direction and workstations are provided to allow these personnel to assist with navigation, communication or mission-related tasks. Immediately behind what is universally known as the cab is the living space, consisting of a pair of bunks and a fresher on one side of the vehicle and a galley plus another pair of bunks on the other. Nominal crew capacity is four in this section of the vehicle, although up to four other personnel may be using the bunks, cooking, in the fresher or moving in and out of the rear section of the vehicle.

The rear section of the vehicle contains a working area normally set up as a command and coordination centre. It can be reconfigured if necessary, providing additional processing capacity for the laboratories or other mission-related tasks. The vehicle's computer core is also located here. The rest of the rear section is taken up with a general-purpose laboratory and four specialised laboratory stations. These are usually configured for life sciences, space or planetary sciences, physical sciences and whatever project the vehicle is currently engaged in. The airlock is at the rear of the vehicle.

The rear section is nominally rated for up to seven personnel – two in the command centre and five using the laboratory spaces. This makes a nominal crew of eleven but it is more common to run with eight in order to rotate use of the bunks and reduce cramping in the rear section. No armament is fitted to the standard FAMAT-12 but both compartments have ring mounts accessed via a top hatch. These mounts are sometimes used for light support weapons but may also carry instruments or additional communications gear. Militarised FAMAT-12 vehicles typically use a specialist rear section mounting a rotating turret, whilst specialist versions may carry a crane or earthmoving equipment on the rear section, often in an unpressurised or open mounting.

The FAMAT-12 is used aboard the ships of the Solomani expedition in place of standard ATVs. Each ship carries either four or six FAMAT-12s, with the remainder of its capacity taken up with smaller vehicles.

ARMOUR

FRONT 10

REAR 8

SIDES 10

TOP 17



FAMAT-12 ATV

TL	12
SKILL	DRIVE (WHEEL)
AGILITY	+1
SPEED (CRUISE)	HIGH (MEDIUM)
RANGE (CRUISE)	1,800 (2,700)
CREW	11
PASSENGERS	—
CARGO	—
HULL	90
SHIPPING	15 TONS
COST	MCR 2.2419

TRAITS

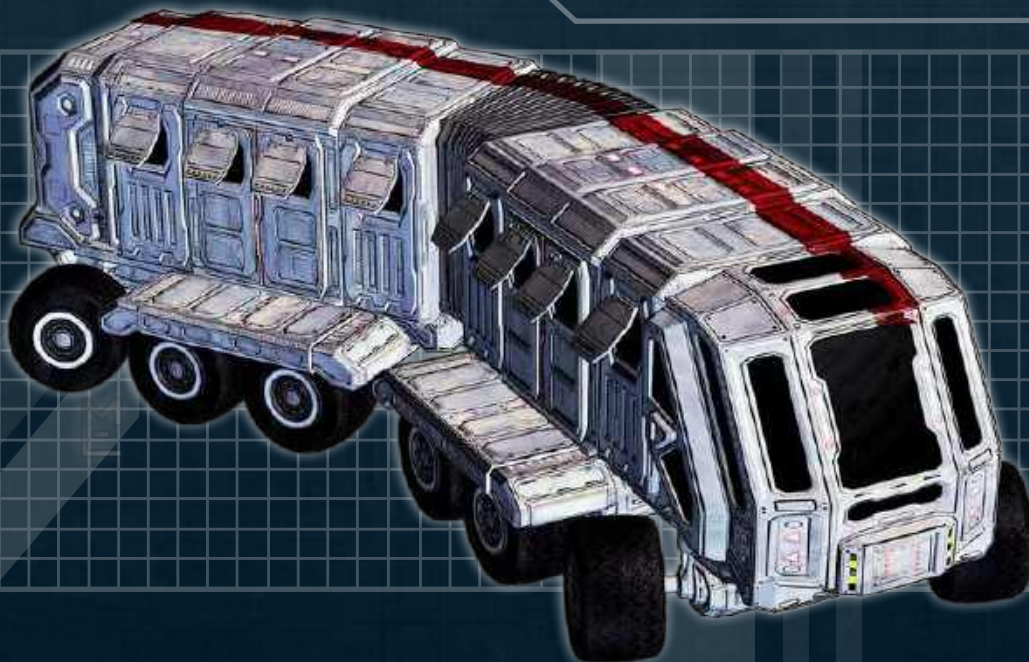
ATV

Autopilot (skill level)	3
Communications (range)	10,000km
Navigation (Navigation DM)	+2
Sensors (Electronics (sensors) DM)	+2
Camouflage (Recon DM)	—
Stealth (Electronics (sensors) DM)	—

EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS

Airlock, Autopilot (advanced), Bunks x2 , Command Centre, Communications System (advanced, satellite uplink, increased range), Computer/3, Control Systems (advanced), Fire Extinguishers, Fresher, Insidious Environment Protection, Laboratory, Life Support (short-term, 20 personnel), Mini-Galley, Navigation System (improved), Sensors (improved, increased range, increased fidelity), Smart Wheels, Vacuum Protection

Ring Mounts x2



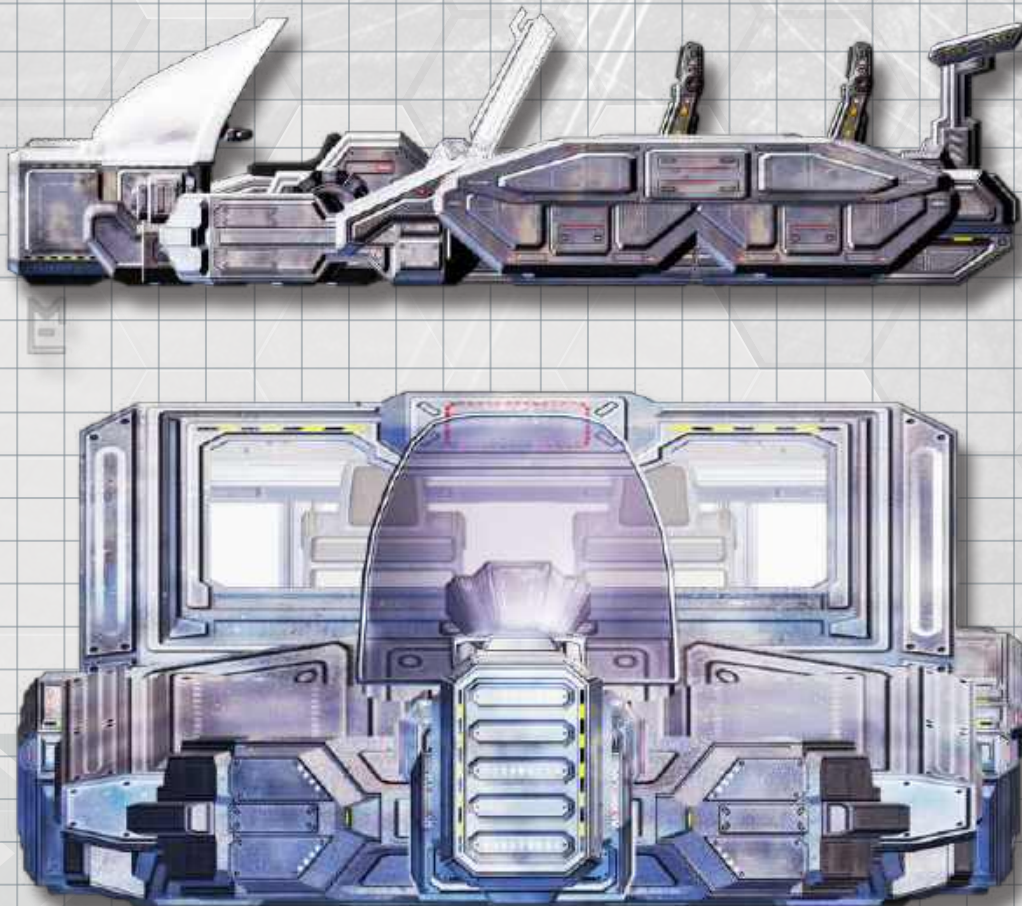
OUTRIDER GRAV PLATFORM

The Outrider falls somewhere between grav bike and grav sled. It is a semi-open-frame vehicle ridden by a single crewmember, with a wide platform behind the rider, which can be used for a variety of purposes. The rider sits astride the vehicle, protected at the front by a streamlined fairing. A life-support system fitted to the vehicle allows the driver to plug in a vacc suit for effectively unlimited endurance, although remaining sealed in a suit for long periods is unpleasant at best.

Behind the rider is a configurable platform equivalent to four Spaces, with a removable front fairing and rear spoiler. With these in place the vehicle is capable of extremely high speeds in an atmosphere but are sometimes removed to allow an alternate configuration to be put in place. The standardised fittings used to secure cargo to the platform can also mount weapons, instruments or open seats for up to four passengers. These also have the plug-in life support function.

An enclosed box-superstructure can be mounted on the platform, breaking up the streamlining and lowering Speed to Fast (High). The superstructure can be used to carry equipment such as a mobile laboratory or a tiny living space to permit crews working outside to obtain some relief. For field work on vacuum worlds two grav platforms can be landed side-by-side and their superstructures connected with a flexible tube. This allows the creation of a tiny base; one superstructure contains an airlock and galley, the other a fresher and bunkroom. Vacc suit and equipment maintenance loadouts are also possible.

In military or paramilitary use a small weapon can be carried on a ring mount and operated by a gunner on the platform or on a fixed mount firing through a port in the forward fairing. A turreted weapon could be carried on the platform but this configuration is rare; there are cheaper weapons carriers with similar capabilities.



ARMOUR

FRONT 4

REAR 4

SIDES 4



OUTRIDER GRAV PLATFORM

TL	12
SKILL	FLYER (GRAV)
AGILITY	+5
SPEED (CRUISE)	VERY FAST (FAST)
RANGE (CRUISE)	6,000 (9,000)
CREW	1
PASSENGERS	—
CARGO	1 TON
HULL	12
SHIPPING	3 TONS
COST	CR631750

TRAITS

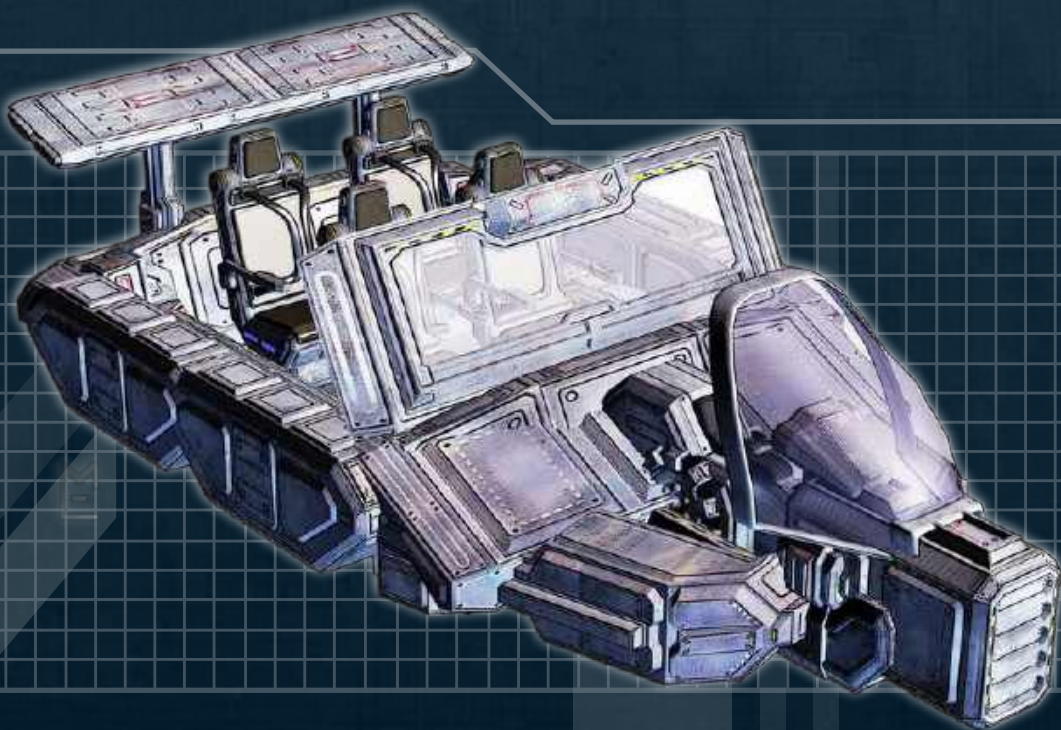
ATV

Autopilot (skill level)	3
Communications (range)	10,000km
Navigation (Navigation DM)	+2
Sensors (Electronics (sensors) DM)	+2
Camouflage (Recon DM)	—
Stealth (Electronics (sensors) DM)	—

EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS

Autopilot (advanced), Communications System (advanced, increased range), Control Systems (advanced), Fire Extinguishers, Life Support (short-term), Navigation System (improved), Sensors (improved, increased range)

Ring Mount



GIANT BIOLOGICALS

A Biological can use any body attached to its braincase, providing it has been grown to be compatible. It is presumed to be impossible to stick a braincase atop the corpse of a decapitated human; the two are incompatible. Some scientists have postulated that an interface device might be created but this is the stuff of nightmares. There is no evidence to date that this has ever been attempted.

The majority of Biologicals are connected to clumps of plants, typically an area of vines and stalks around 3–10 metres in diameter or use basic ambulator bodies to do work on behalf of the enclave. Giant bodies are used by some braincases, including starships and non-jump-capable spacecraft as well as the equivalent of earthmoving machinery or combat vehicles.

It is not necessary to present detailed rules for biological vehicles and starships in this adventure, as they are antagonists whose technology cannot be adapted for use by the Travellers on any meaningful timescale. Bioship components are not compatible with electronics and cannot be 'black boxed' in the usual manner. It is common to fit an advanced component with standard connections and feeds in order to allow it to be integrated into a lower-tech vessel. This is not generally feasible with bioship components, as they are grown into the vessel as a whole and often highly dispersed. The converse is not the case; a bioship that gains access to electronic components may be able to grow around them and incorporate them, although this process will take years. This ability is the result of Droyne experiments, in which the braincases studied by Oyskrusk and his crew were 'taught' to incorporate Droyne electronics and physical devices.

GIANT BIOLOGICALS: PRINCIPLES

A bioship or other large Biological body needs food and energy. This is not much of a problem for a body operating on a habitable planet but those venturing into space face additional challenges as it is not possible to simply stop and put down some roots when the bioship's internal reserves are used up. Thus a bioship's endurance has short and long-term limits.

The short-term limit is defined by energy. This is stored within the bioship's tissues and depleted by functions such as movement or combat – and especially by making a jump to another star system. Energy can be replenished by photosynthesis, requiring only a star. Photosynthesis takes place on a constant basis when the ship is in a star system and is sufficient to sustain activity over a long period. This is the equivalent of trickle-charging a battery and is not enough by itself to sustain the bioship indefinitely. Eventually, reserves become depleted and the bioship needs to undertake a full replenishment.

Replenishment can be accomplished by a bioship entering a dormant state in orbit around a star. However, whilst this refills the energy storage capability of the bioship's tissues, they degrade over time. When subsisting off stored energy, the bioship gradually consumes its own tissues, creating internal pockets filled with its own degraded matter; a sort of self-created compost cannibalised for nutrients. This sludge is usually dumped into the soil under a landed bioship and the cavities refilled with new, energy-rich tissues.

Growing new tissues or replacing degraded ones requires more than just energy. A bioship must also feed. Commonly, a bioship will land on a planet and combine photosynthesis with taking up nutrients from the soil. This is far more sustainable than just feeding off stars and allows the bioship to grow new components. This process is not fast, however.

Credit values for bioship components are utterly meaningless; all that really matters is the time taken to produce them and regrow the surrounding hull matter to facilitate their use. A bioship can slough off damaged components or break them down to use as sustenance, so a bioship might grow and shrink over time as it undertakes long voyages and uses its own body to keep functioning, then land for a few decades to feed and regrow. An average growth rate of one day per displacement ton can be assumed for long-term growth, although the process is much slower at the beginning.

Bioships manoeuvre much like any other spacegoing craft but their jump drive works a little differently. It is derived from the Ancients drive but implemented as a complex living system. A bioship will usually be capable of at most a two-parsec jump – many are confined to a single star system and have no jump capacity at all. Those that can jump require a charging time ranging from days to weeks and bioships capable of more than a two-parsec jump are thought to need months to charge their drive. It is actually quicker in most cases for a bioship to make shorter jumps but since they are not capable of deep-space jumps the only way to cross a rift is to make a long-preparation jump. Since most bioships cannot cross regions of low stellar density, the Transition Zone has remained an effective barrier to their progress into the Far Side of Nowhere.

Bioship Components

The hull of a bioship or other giant Biological is not the same thing as a conventional starship hull. The majority of components are integrated and distributed throughout the vessel rather than being fitted in a removable manner. Changing the interior and component fit of a bioship is a long process requiring tissues being broken down and new items grown into the space created. This is constantly ongoing in the case of most bioships.

A bioship does not need a bridge since it is a living creature directed by its braincase. Internal spaces suitable for carrying other braincases, or supporting braincases without a body, can be opened up relatively easily, taking just days. This can be shortened to moments in an emergency; an ambulator can enter a bioship and simply cut away internal tissues if the controlling braincase allows it. There are no 'crew spaces' required, since all functions are carried out by the bioship's body so most Biologicals carried by a bioship simply take root in its tissues and wait to arrive at wherever they are going. If other creatures, such as humans, were to be carried a suitable space would have to be made along with provision for life support.

A bioship hull can be much tougher than a metal starship hull of the same tonnage, since it is more or less solid, but bioship tissues are intrinsically less robust than starship construction materials. Giant Biologicals have one Hull point per ton on average, although this can vary 50% or more either way depending on how many internal systems the body must carry. Similarly, bioship armour is not as hard or resilient as normal starship armour; it is simply harder and more dense hull tissue. The bioship's hull percentage gives a level of intrinsic protection that can be increased by growing more tough outer skin. A typical bioship has Armour: 4 but this can vary between 0 and 20 points.



BIOSHIP WEAPONS

Bioships do not have hardpoints in the conventional sense, as weapons are grown from the hull. However, there is a limit to how many weapons a giant Biological can mount. This is indicated by the availability of 'weapon nodes' on the hull. Each node can carry a weapon of the node's size or smaller.

XX/1----

WEAPON NODES

Node Size	Number Available
Minor	1 per 10 tons
Intermediate	1 per 100 tons
Major	1 per 1,000 tons
Giant	1 per 10,000 tons

Thus an 8,500 ton bioship has 850 minor nodes, 85 intermediate nodes, eight major nodes and no giant nodes.

Most bioship weapons are kinetic-energy devices with a short effective range. There are three variants on most weapons, although the basic type is far more common than the others. If no special capability is indicated the standard type is assumed to be present. These weapons are generally formed from tough plant fibres which squash on impact, delivering kinetic energy in a manner that standard starship armour is not designed to cope with. As a result, armour and hull plate tend to be buckled in rather than punched through, defeating armour in almost the exact opposite way to penetrators.

Spreader Variant

Some weapons are designed to crack the armour of hard targets. The spreader variant delivers reduced damage but is designed to punch into a target then extend

fronds, which push armour apart. This is not especially effective against metal ships, however, so spreader weapons are generally ineffective against well-protected ships. If a spreader variant projectile hits a ship or craft, its AP score is compared to the target's armour. If it is greater than the armour, the weapon's damage is applied and in addition there is a chance of damaging the target's armour. If the AP score is not enough to get through the armour, the weapon simply bounces off with no damage dealt. A spreader can also be used to deliver ambulators to a target for a boarding action. The ambulators will suffer little damage cocooned inside the projectile, emerging from its remains to attack or take control of the target if the armour is breached.

Corrosive Variant

Corrosive weapons deliver less damage than the standard type but will attack armour and hull plate for a time after impact. When a corrosive weapon hits, it delivers its impact damage immediately and squashes onto the target. The following round its full corrosive damage is delivered, along with a chance to destroy one or more points of the target's armour. Each round thereafter, damage is reduced by the indicated amount and the remainder applied until corrosive damage reaches zero. Armour is not affected after the first round of corrosive damage.

XX/1----

MINOR WEAPONS

Most minor weapons operate on the *Traveller* scale and are not a threat to spacecraft unless they are very fragile. They are the equivalent of anti-personnel mounts for close-in defence.

Grabtangles: Clusters of creepers or spiny branches that can entangle a Traveller are known as grabtangles. They can also be used to anchor a bioship to a surface and will grow into a root system if they reach suitable soil but mostly serve as minor manipulator arms. A Traveller within 3 metres of a grabtangle cluster may be lashed for up to 2D damage or grabbed and held, requiring a Difficult (10+) DEX check to avoid or an Average (8+) STR check to pull free.

Spitter Clusters: A spitter cluster is a grouping of foliage resembling a grabtangle but with multiple pods capable of spitting thorny spines. The effective range of a burst is around 20 metres in an atmosphere but five times that in vacuum. The spines cannot harm a spacecraft but could puncture a vacc suit. Anyone hit suffers 2D damage and risks penetration of protective equipment.

Dart: A dart is a one-shot kinetic-energy missile. Once launched it will grow back in 1D days. Darts are not very dangerous to large spacecraft but can harm a small vessel. The standard dart delivers 2D damage on the starship scale.

INTERMEDIATE WEAPONS

Intermediate weapons all operate on the starship scale and are a threat to most targets.

Javelin: The javelin is a larger and more dangerous version of the dart. It functions as a kinetic-energy missile, delivering respectable impact damage or a corrosive or spreader effect. A javelin takes 3D days to grow back once launched.

Gobbet Launcher: A gobbet launcher spits a lump of loose plant fibres, often including soil, rocks and debris from a planetary surface. The gobbet flattens on

impact, acting much like a dum-dum bullet to maximise crushing impact potential. A gobbet launcher can fire once every round and uses some of the bioship's hull matter in doing so. Firing a gobbet launcher inflicts one point damage to the bioship itself.



Javelin

MAJOR WEAPONS

Major weapons require a major weapon node.

M-Bomb Launcher: An m-bomb is a ball of specialised matter, very similar to that making up the bioship's equivalent of a manoeuvre drive. An m-bomb launcher can fire once every 2D rounds, costing 1D Hull points per round to reload until ready. The weapon does not need to hit its target to have an effect; when an m-bomb gets close to a target it 'detonates' in a pulse similar to a manoeuvre drive running wild. All craft within Close range sustain 4D damage and may suffer additional effects.

Craft with a tonnage less than 100 times multiplied by the damage caused are flung out of control. Their manoeuvre drive will be overloaded and shut down unless the pilot makes an immediate Very Difficult (12+) Pilot check to ride the shockwave. If the craft goes out of control it cannot be corrected until the drive is restarted. This requires an Average (8+) Engineer (m-drive) check, which can be attempted each round. The drive will automatically restart after 2D rounds.

Ships with a greater tonnage suffer damage but no other ill effects. M-bombs are used to scatter asteroidal debris or dig holes in a loose surface. Usually this is a scrape to hide in, on the surface of a dusty rockball, but at need a bioship could blast a hole in loose soil with a few m-bombs and cover itself quickly. M-bombs could be used for other purposes, such as scattering a salvo of missiles or even personnel during a ground assault.

Driver: A driver is a larger version of the gobbet launcher, hurling a large chunk of debris or hull matter to cause heavy impact damage. A driver can fire every round, inflicting 2D Hull points of damage each time.

Spear: A spear is an even larger version of the dart or javelin, capable of inflicting heavy damage. It takes 6D days to grow back a spear after it is used.



spear

GIANT WEAPONS

Giant weapons can only be grown by bioships over 10,000 tons in displacement.

Lance: The lance is the largest biological missile type weapon used by bioships. A lance takes 10D days to regrow after being used.

Weapon	Node Size	Range	Impact Damage	Additional Damage or Effects
Grabtangle	Minor	Personal	2D	Grab or entangle personnel instead.
Spitter Cluster	Minor	Personal	2D	—
Dart	Minor	Close	2D	—
Javelin	Intermediate	Short	6D	AP2
Spreader Javelin	Intermediate	Short	2D	6D if armour defeated by impact damage, plus 1 in 6 chance to destroy 1 point of Armour.
Corrosive Javelin	Intermediate	Short	2D	3D corrosive damage plus 1 in 6 chance to destroy one point of armour. Corrosive damage decreases by 1D each round.
Gobbet Launcher	Intermediate	Short	4D	AP2
Corrosive Gobbet Launcher	Intermediate	Short	1D	6D corrosive damage plus 1 in 6 chance to destroy one point of armour. Corrosive damage drops by 2D each round.
M-Bomb Launcher	Major	Medium	4D	Gravitational pulse wave effect.
Driver	Major	Medium	6D	AP4
Corrosive Driver	Major	Medium	3D	9D corrosive damage plus 1 in 6 chance to destroy one point of armour. Corrosive damage drops by 3D each round.
Spear	Major	Medium	2DD	AP6
Spreader Spear	Major	Medium	5D	4DD if armour defeated by impact damage, plus 1 in 6 chance to destroy 1 point of armour.
Corrosive Spear	Major	Medium	10D	16D corrosive damage plus D3 chances to destroy one point of armour. Probability is 3 in 6. Corrosive damage decreases by 4D each round.
Lance	Giant	Long	10DD	AP12
Spreader Lance	Giant	Long	2DD	12DD if armour defeated by impact damage, plus 2 in 6 chance to destroy 1 point of armour.
Corrosive Lance	Giant	Long	4DD	16DD corrosive damage plus 1D chances to destroy one point of armour. Probability is 3 in 6. Corrosive damage decreases by 4DD each round.

BIOSHIPS IN COMBAT

Bioships are huge and powerful but ultimately they are intelligent plants. They do not use sophisticated tactics and have never run a theoretical exercise in how to defeat an opposing starship, so a bioship that must fight will do so in an erratic and inefficient manner. Most of their weapons involve launching parts of themselves at a target and cannot produce sustained firepower. A fight with a bioship is not like an engagement against fellow humans or the races of Charted Space and does not use standard spacecraft combat rules.

The weapons launched by a bioship can do a great deal of damage to a conventional starship, especially if armour is degraded. The Travellers may find themselves seeking to avoid damage rather than winning the fight at any cost, which can make an engagement far more interesting. A bioship can be outfought by *Deepnight Revelation* without undue difficulty but eliminating one whilst avoiding the need for complex repairs is more of a challenge. The Travellers should be encouraged to think of bioships as puzzles to solve and a cautious strategy should be rewarded. If the Travellers just bull in and start shooting, the Referee is welcome to have the bioship fling everything it can at them. If they are a little more clever, they can change the odds by triggering shots beyond the bioship's effective range or similar clever tactics.

The most potent bioships can best be defeated by inducing them to launch their largest weapons in small numbers, enabling the Travellers to shoot them down piecemeal. This is relatively difficult to do but will leave the bioship without its primary weapon systems. The Travellers may well learn to be respectful of a corrosive lance or spear and use tactics of this sort to reduce their effectiveness.

Some weapons are less effective than expected against the dense plant fibres of a bioship. Lasers and inert projectiles such as rail gun or mass driver ammunition deliver only half damage and treat Armour scores as doubled. Explosive or less focused energy weapons (such as particle accelerators, fusion or plasma guns) deliver normal damage.

Defending Against Bioship Missiles

The missile-like projectiles launched by a bioship can be engaged by defences but electronic warfare is wholly useless. These 'missiles' are not guided and have a short range as a result but can cause significant damage if they strike a target; the only ways to avoid being hit are to evade or intercept the missile. Passive evasion, in

the sense of varying thrust and heading, is a standard tactic in starship combat and it is possible to make a deliberate evasion by monitoring the bioship closely and predicting the moment of launch. Once a missile is in flight it is too late to evade; this is more a matter of reading the bioship's 'body language' and evading at the expected moment of launch.

Evading a bioship missile requires a Formidable (14+) Pilot check, with the vessel's thrust as a positive DM. If the Travellers can come up with some clever ways of predicting or even triggering a launch they may be able to make evasion easier.

If a missile cannot be evaded, it can be shot down. This is not as easy as with technological weapons, however. Normally penetration of a missile's casing by a laser or group of rail gun projectiles will disable it or cause an explosion but the kinetic-energy weapons used by bioships do not have critical components. They must be burned away or blasted apart to stop them.

Very small missiles – those designated darts by humans who have encountered them – are stopped by weapons and point defence networks as normal. Larger missiles must receive a significant amount of damage. It takes 10 points of damage to stop a javelin, 100 points to stop a spear and 1,000 points to stop a lance. Barbette and bay weapons cannot target a fast-moving missile but the Travellers may be able to improvise some kind of incendiary interceptor missile or torpedo that can be launched from a bay to make a successful intercept.

Fixing Armour Damage

When armour is damaged by corrosive effects or a spreader missile, this does not mean an entire layer of armour is neatly peeled away. Armour protection is sufficiently compromised that the vessel's Armour score is reduced but most of the materials are still present. Armour damage can usually be repaired providing repair drones or suitably equipped personnel can access the damaged area to remove the most damaged parts and replace or patch any gaps.

Repairing a point of armour damage caused by a spreader or similar device requires an Average (8+) Engineer check on the part of the Traveller overseeing the repair. The check is Difficult (10+) if the armour damage was caused by corrosive weapons. If a check is failed, that point of armour cannot be fixed with a field repair. A dockyard or a lengthy repair operation is required. However, other armour damage may still be fixable in the short term.

TECHNOLOGICAL COMPONENTS

Bioship components are not compatible with those of technological starships but the converse is not always true. It would be virtually impossible to graft a biological system onto a standard starship but the Biologicals were 'taught' to incorporate technological items by the Droyne expedition. Most commonly this is seen at the personnel scale, with an ambulator body fitted with a simple tool such as a blade or shovel. However, even complex electronic devices can be utilised. This requires a long period of what might be termed 'study' in which a bioship or ambulator body grows around the component and the braincase experiments with it in an instinctive manner.

A braincase will be successful sooner or later in figuring out how to use the device it has assimilated. It may not be efficient or inventive in the use of the device but over time it will learn what it can and cannot do. This process can take decades or centuries but the Biologicals live a long time so this is not usually a problem. The

implications for other races in the same region of space are disturbing however; a piece of technology captured by a bioship today may reappear in usable form aboard other bioships in a century's time, so the Biologicals' technological capabilities will slowly advance. They may not be able to keep pace with the rapid advancement of more conventional species but could gain access to critical systems that give them advantages. One of the most dangerous is a quick-charging long-range jump drive, which would enable the Biologicals to cross natural barriers and expand quickly into areas where they might threaten local starfaring races.

The Referee can make use of the Biologicals' ability to make use of technological items to give the Travellers a nasty surprise or two. Ambulators might be encountered armed with high-technology vehicular weapons, creating a sort of biological tank or bioships might be armed with technological weapons such as lasers or particle accelerators. It is possible the end result of this process will be bioship hulls controlled by a single braincase but capable of using the whole range of technological components.



ALLIES AND OPPONENTS

The majority of the opposition encountered by the Travellers in the course of this adventure comes from Biologicals. Their ambulator bodies can have very different characteristics depending on the role they are intended to carry out and local conditions.

The level of intellect displayed by Biologicals can vary considerably but in all cases this value should be used with caution. The intelligence of these creatures represents their ability to solve immediate problems rather than conduct theoretical analysis. Biologicals display very little – if any – abstract thought and are not creative. They will act to overcome a problem they have encountered according to their INT value. A low-INT Biological will repeat ineffectual or obviously useless actions where a ‘smarter’ one will try something different but neither is likely to plan ahead or try to bypass a potential problem.

It is possible that older braincases could gain an increase in effective INT, although this is more likely to represent memory of previous successful efforts than an increase in creativity. This is the great tragedy of the Biologicals; they are long-lived yet generally unable to put that time to use. On the other hand, they are persistent to a degree impossible for fleshy mortals to match.

GENERAL-PURPOSE AMBULATOR

Characteristics

STR 2D+2 (9)

END 2D+2 (9)

DEX 2D (7)

INT 2D (7)

Armour: Outer skin (+2)

An ambulator body will normally have 25 hits (totalled from STR, DEX and END as usual) and can be made to cease functioning meaningfully by delivering this much damage. However, if there is a braincase aboard the remains of the body will still try to crawl away and begin repairing itself or send plant-like shoots into the ground and attempt to grow a body vine. Destroying the braincase is usually a separate task (see *Far Side of Nowhere*, page 32) unless something extremely destructive like a hyperbaric charge or plasma gun is used.

Many general-purpose ambulators have no skills as such. They exist to move things around, to attack threats or as mobile observation points. A general-

purpose ambulator can attack by lashing with its most mobile appendages or simply charging into a target. These close combat attacks are based on raw STR without penalties for a lack of skill as they are natural functions. If an ambulator attempts to use a weapon of some kind it will receive the normal penalty for lacking skill. However, ambulators that grow weapons such as combat spikes or spine spitters are assumed to have skill level 0 in their use and can gain a higher effective skill level through experience. Even if an ambulator is not taught and does not practice, its skill with its grown weapons will increase over time.



SPACEGOING AMBULATORS

Ambulators carried by bioships are often adapted to function in space. They cannot do so indefinitely, and will suffer one point of damage every hour when operating in hard vacuum or an environment close to it. They typically have one or more very long cable-like appendages, which can be used to anchor the ambulator like a safety line. Spacegoing ambulators have thick outer skins and generally take the form of a tight central cluster with multiple limbs, although this is not universal. Overall capabilities are higher than planet-bound ambulators; some have spine spitters as grown weapons, although most rely on their thorny appendages.

Characteristics

STR 2D+2 (9)

END 2D+2 (9)

DEX 2D (7)

INT 2D (7)

Hits: 25

Skills: Athletics (dexterity) 1, Gun Combat 0, Melee (natural) 1

Weapons: Lash (2D), possible Bone Spitter (2D)

Armour: Outer Skin (+4)



SPACEGOING
AMBULATOR

AMBULATORS AT PPBO BETA

The ambulators at the wreck site on PPBO Beta are weak due to the salty conditions. They do have an advantage in that they do not require light to find the Travellers, as body heat and vibrations caused by movement or even just breathing are sufficient to guide these ambulators to their targets. All are equipped for combat.

Characteristics

STR 2D-1 (6)

END 2D-2 (5)

DEX 2D (7)

INT 2D (7)

Skills: Gun Combat 0, Melee (natural) 1

Weapons: Lash (2D), Combat Spike (2D), possible Bone Spitter (2D)

Armour: Outer Skin (+2)

HEAVY COMBAT AMBULATOR

The heavy combat ambulator is basically a heavy lifter with metallic blades grafted on to some of its appendages and equipped with a bone spitter cannon. Like the heavy lifter it is the size of a small truck, with four to eight main ambulatory limbs and two to four combat limbs. Many have a thumper that causes a rapid expulsion of air, which produces a low-frequency sound and pressure wave up to 15 metres in all directions.

Hits: 150

Skills: Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee (natural) 1

Weapons: Bone Cannon (6D), Combat Blade/Spike (1DD), possible Thumper (4D)

Armour: Outer Skin (+6)



HEAVY COMBAT
AMBULATOR

BIG ONES

The Big Ones vary in size and shape considerably. They are essentially a series of dense clumps of plant matter, each growing around a more or less solid trunk to create a segmented 'body' with an array of long and short appendages. They might be compared to gigantic hairy caterpillars, at least in terms of how they move. Each Big One is different but general characteristics are similar. All Big Ones are protected by tough fibres that can be considered armour and those on the island mount weaponry of some kind.

Hits: 2,500

Skills: Gun Combat 0, Melee (natural) 1

Weapons: Lash (6D), possible Multiple Bone Cannons (6D) or Venom Sprayers (3D), possible Thumper (4D)

Armour: Tough Fibres (+12)

SEAGOING AMBULATORS

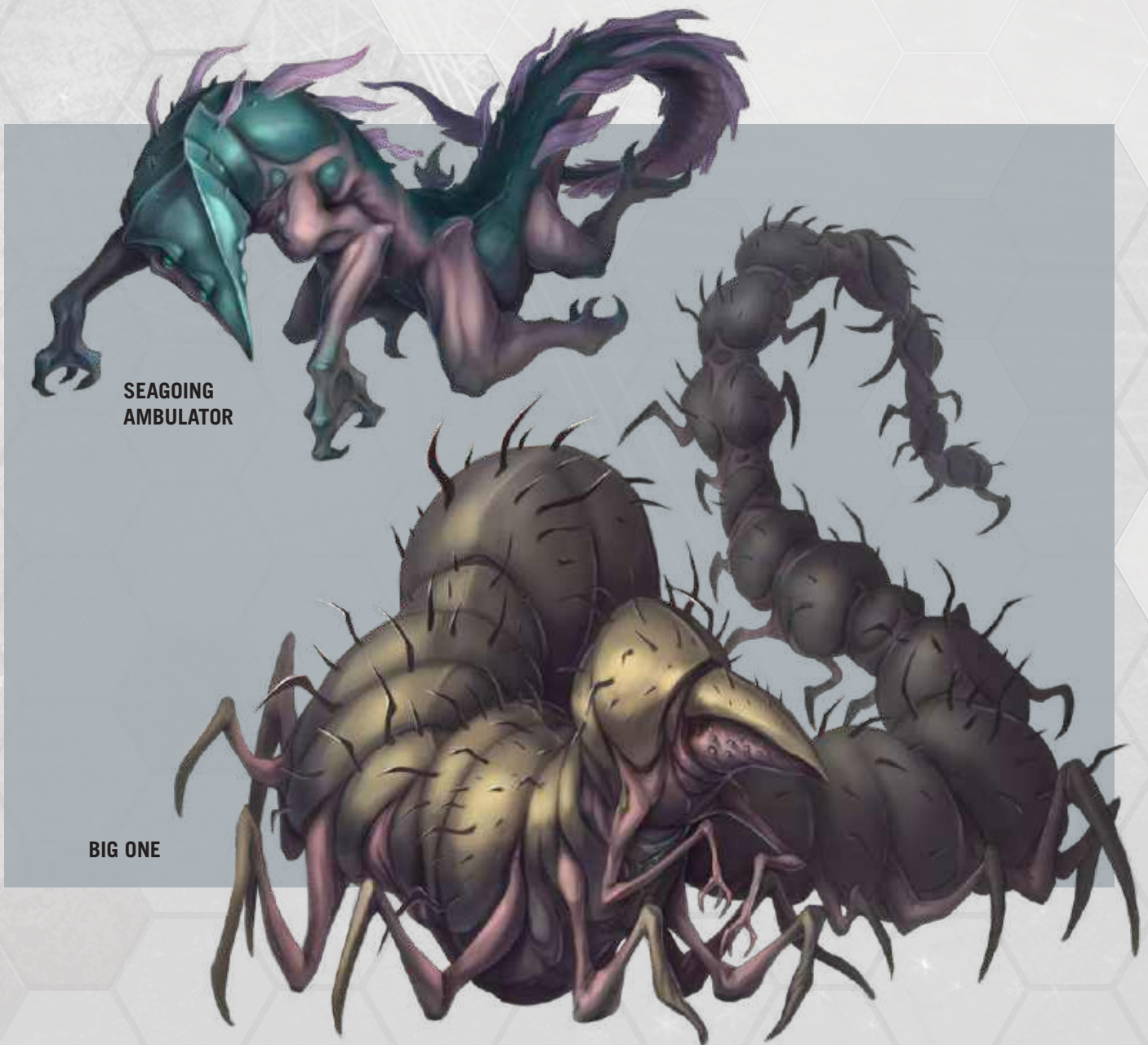
Small (human-sized) seagoing ambulators tend to be rather weak, since the salty environment does not suit the Biologicals. Most resemble a dense log with fronds that could be mistaken for a crocodile-like creature and can slowly drag themselves over land. Some are closer to a floating mass of seaweed in appearance and cannot ambulate on land. These tend to drift slowly and may not be noticed for what they are until they start moving against the tide or wind. They are dangerous mainly to personnel in the water but larger examples can carry land-based ambulators.

Hits: 10

Skills: Melee (natural) 1

Weapons: Combat Spike (1D)

Armour: Tough Fibres (+2)



SEA-MONSTER AMBULATORS

The 'sea monsters' are of two general types. One is a denser version of the Big One, able to regulate its buoyancy with bladders along its fibres. These sea-monsters can move quickly through the water and are capable of entangling a watercraft. Depending on circumstances this can lead to crushing, capsizing or simply dragging the craft down. The second type are Sargasso-like rafts of fronds, which are not much of a threat to anything that does not approach close enough to be entangled but can carry large numbers of land based ambulators. It was these 'floaters' that made the assault crossings from the mainland to the Droyne home islands.

Hits: 1,000

Skills: Gun Combat 0, Melee (natural) 1

Weapons: Lash (6D), possible Multiple Bone Cannons (6D), possible Underwater Thumper (6D)

Armour: Tough Fibres (+12)

AMBULATOR LANDSHIPS

The 'landships' are essentially bioships that have not yet (and may never) learned to operate in space. They use a biologically generated gravitic field to float close to the ground, rarely going above 10 metres other than to clear an obstacle. There are exceptions, however, and some landships are capable of operating in the upper atmosphere. They are armed in the same manner as the Great Bioship but tend to be in the 500–2,000 ton range so tend to mount at most a couple of spears plus a mix of javelins and similar intermediate weapons.

Ambulator landship are starship scale entities.

Size: 1,200 displacement tons

Hits: 1,200

Armour: 4

Weapons: Spear x1 or Driver x1, Gobbet Launcher x4, Javelin (normal, spreader, or corrosive type) x8, Spitter Cluster x60, Grabtangle x60

For Travellers on the ground, fighting a landship is the same as fighting a starship – pretty much impossible. They can be decoyed away, distracted or eliminated with starship weapons. Their sensory apparatus is good enough to spot a starship or spacecraft at thousands of kilometres but humans on the ground are unlikely to be noticed by the landship itself. However, it receives information from other Biologicals on a constant basis. If any of them know where the Travellers are, the landships do too.



SEA MONSTER
AMBULATOR

ESKUSKROY AND THE DROYNE

Eskuskroy and his followers might join the expedition as long-term members or might only be encountered on Draytsirv. Either way they are useful allies. These are TL10 Droyne, whose technology is broadly similar to that of the Travellers – just less advanced. They can learn to use equipment aboard *Deepnight Revelation* readily enough but this will take some time. If they are simply handed something that is not familiar or simple to use, all tasks carried out with that piece of equipment are subject to an unskilled DM-3 until the Droyne have had some training or at least gained familiarity with the equipment in the field.

ESKUSKROY: DROYNE LEADER

STR 4 DEX 8 END 5 INT 9 EDU 9 SOC 10

Skills: Diplomat 1, Heavy Weapons (man portable) 1, Leadership 2, Melee 0, Recon 1, Seafarer (submarine) 1, Survival 1, Tactics (military) 2

Weapons: Home-built flamethrower (6D), Machete (2D)

Eskuskroy will continue to lead the Droyne in the field until he is killed. There is no other suitable candidate among the Droyne survivors so he is utterly priceless to them. They will protect him at the cost of their own lives or those of the Travellers.

DROYNE TECHNICIAN

STR 5 DEX 9 END 5 INT 9 EDU 8 SOC 7

Skills: Electronics 0, Explosives 1, Gun Combat 0, Mechanic 2, Melee 0, Survival 1

Weapons: Assault Rifle (3D, Auto 2), Machete (2D), Incendiary Grenade (5D, Fire)

Technicians on Draytsirv rarely get to work on high-technology systems. They have spent the last few years dismantling potentially useful devices and building crude systems. Most are adept at improvising explosives and incendiaries from a range of materials.

DROYNE WARRIOR

STR 11 DEX 8 END A INT 5 EDU 3 SOC 5

Skills: Gun Combat (slug) 2, Heavy Weapons (man portable) 1, Melee (blade) 2, Recon 2, Survival 1

Weapons: Assault Rifle (3D, Auto 2), Machete (2D), Incendiary Grenade (5D, Fire)

Warriors on Draytsirv fulfil their ancient function virtually unchanged. They are pragmatic but obedient and will unhesitatingly obey an order to make a suicidal attack or defence – so long as it comes from their own leader.

THE SOLOMANI

The Solomani expedition comes from a culture familiar to the Travellers and their equipment is broadly similar. It would not be difficult for members of this expedition to fit in aboard *Deepnight Revelation*, at least in terms of skills and competencies. There might be some major interpersonal and political issues but that is a problem for the Travellers to solve.

SOLOMANI CREWMEMBER

STR 7 DEX 8 END 6 INT 8 EDU 8 SOC 7

Skills: Athletics 0, Electronics (any) 1, Gun Combat 0, Mechanic 1, Science (any) 1, Vacc Suit 1

Weapons: 6mm Carbine (3D-1) or 10mm Autopistol (3D-3)

Typical crewmembers are generalists with some training in a scientific area along with skills relevant to living and working aboard a starship. To these should be added 1–3 levels of specialist skills ranging from Steward to Engineer, depending on the crewmember's role.

SOLSEC MONITOR

STR 8 DEX 8 END 9 INT 8 EDU 7 SOC 8

Skills: Athletics 0, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Mechanic 1, Melee (unarmed) 1, Persuade 1, Vacc Suit 1

Weapons: 10mm Autopistol (3D-3) and/or 10mm submachinegun (3D-3, Auto 3)

Armour: Flak Jacket (+5)

The monitors placed aboard the expedition's ships by Solomani Security (SolSec) answer to the political officer rather than the captain unless they are operating undercover. Most of the monitors on the expedition are well-respected and liked by their crewmates, having served as security for many a dangerous planetside expedition. A few are inclined to be unpleasant bullies but the stereotypical 'SolSec goon' was not considered suitable for a long mission. Monitors have shipboard roles and should add one to three levels of specialist skills to suit their tasks.

SOLOMANI OFFICER

STR 6 DEX 7 END 5 INT 9 EDU 10 SOC 9

Skills: Admin 1, Athletics 0, Diplomat 1, Gun Combat 0, Leadership 1, Melee 0, Tactics (naval) 1, Vacc Suit 1

Weapons: 8mm Revolver (3D-2), Dress Sword (2D)

The officers of the expedition are drawn from the Confederation Navy and trained for general shipboard leadership roles. In addition, they will have two to four skill levels in specialist areas including shipboard tasks like piloting or astrogating the vessel, plus sciences, liaison and diplomacy.

LIEUTENANT JARRIS FALLON, SOLOMANI SECURITY

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Solomani		Male		—
TRAITS		—		SKILLS
STR	5	INT	8	Admin 1
DEX	6	EDU	9	Diplomat 2
END	5	SOC	9	Gun Combat 0
				Investigate 1
				Leadership 1
				Medic 1
				Melee 0
				Science
				(xenoarchaeology) 2
				Vacc Suit 1
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: 8mm Revolver (3D-2), Dress Sword (2D)		



BACKGROUND

The officers of the Solomani expedition know that protocol demands an officer from SolSec must be part of any detachment sent aboard a foreign vessel. If the political officers of their ships are unacceptable, the best compromise is Lieutenant Fallon. He is the most senior of SolSec officer aboard the expedition's ships who is not assigned to one of them as political officer and has served with distinction as the mission's 'internal security records officer', a rather sinister title that mostly means annotating reports about crew mental health, morale and general fitness for duty.

Lieutenant Fallon is well liked and respected among his crewmates and quite the opposite of the stereotypical 'SolSec weasel' character portrayed in far too many entertainment vids. He serves as a diplomatic and liaison officer for the expedition and gets along easily

with almost anyone. The Travellers might be suspicious of this but Jarris is genuinely a people-person. He sees his duty with SolSec as providing a service to his crewmates, looking out for them and intervening where necessary to head off a problem for the good of all. He has a degree in xenoarchaeology and often leads expeditions into ruins or in a first-contact situation.

Lieutenant Fallon can provide useful insight into the culture of the people of Terminus and will more than pull his weight if the Travellers take him along. This is of course part of his diplomatic role, making a good impression and showing the Confederation Navy in the best possible light. However, he was not put forward entirely for political reasons; he is a genuinely useful and hard-working member of the expedition.

LIEUTENANT MARYE VALENTINA, CONFEDERATION NAVY

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Solomani		Female		—
TRAITS		—		SKILLS
STR	5	INT	8	Admin 0
DEX	8	EDU	9	Diplomat 0
END	6	SOC	8	Gun Combat 0
				Investigate 1
				Leadership 0
				Melee 0
				Science (biology) 3
				Tactics 0
				Vacc Suit 1
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: 8mm Revolver (3D-2), Dress Sword (2D)		



BACKGROUND

Lieutenant Valentina would probably describe herself as ‘navy but only just’. She completed a token period of service with the navy after qualifying as an officer, then returned to her primary role as a scientist. This is common with personnel assigned to the more specialist parts of the Confederation’s exploration apparatus. Like other scientists on the expedition, Lieutenant Valentina is just about capable of functioning as a naval officer and can supervise routine shipboard tasks but is very much a researcher first and foremost.

Valentina is reliable and steady, and respected by her crewmates. However, she does not make friends easily and will be very uncomfortable aboard *Deepnight Revelation*. This manifests as a rather pedantic stand-offishness and a near-obsession with perfect uniform. The

Travellers will eventually realise this is armour against the unfamiliar environment and that Marye can be coaxed into functioning as a well-integrated team member.

She can provide useful insight into matters surrounding ecosystems and the Deepnight Entity, not least because she is seeing the data for the first time. Where the Travellers have gradually gained more information and may have preconceptions based on their initial very patchy data, Valentina is building a picture from more complete information. She does have one rather annoying habit, however. She is a proponent of the ‘humanity first and best’ mindset and whilst she is polite to non-humans she is prone to use her knowledge of biology to find reasons why this or that creature is just slightly inferior due to the conditions it evolved in. This unconscious racism can skew her otherwise sound scientific judgement.

COMMANDER ELRYS APSEL, CONFEDERATION NAVY

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Solomani		Female		—
TRAITS		—		SKILLS
STR	4	INT	11	Admin 0
DEX	5	EDU	12	Diplomat 0
END	3	SOC	9	Electronics (computers) 1
				Gun Combat 0
				Investigate 1
				Leadership 0
				Melee 0
				Science (cosmology) 4
				Science (physics) 3
				Vacc Suit 0
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: 8mm Revolver (3D-2), Dress Sword (2D)		



BACKGROUND

Commander Apsel is the senior scientific officer of the expedition, in terms of years as well as rank. She is not in the expedition's chain of command as she is a specialist officer, much like a medical officer or senior researcher might hold rank without being able to function as a command officer. Indeed, there are those who would say that Commander Apsel can barely function as a human being. She is not racist as such; she despises everyone but at least does them the courtesy of finding something specific to hate about them. The reason for this general antipathy towards the universe and everyone in it is largely bitterness caused by the vagaries of academia. Having failed to become a senior professor at a prestigious university, for what she considers unfair reasons, Elrys returned to the exploration arm of the navy as a gravitation and cosmology expert.

Commander Apsel is abrasive, rude and well aware that she is critical to the expedition. It is not possible for the expedition's leaders to justify sending a party to Terminus Point without her – if the Travellers will not take Commander Apsel, a Solomani ship will have to make the transit after all. The more diplomatic members of the detachment are likely to spend a lot of time apologising for her conduct.

For all that, Apsel can provide the Travellers with a great deal of information about the gravitational phenomenon at Terminus Point – in a condescending manner, of course. If the Travellers do not have any other gravitational scientists available, Commander Apsel may be necessary to the process of figuring out how to get through the gravitational shell around Terminus and can warn against an attempt at getting back out again.

(PETTY OFFICER) DANIEL RYDER, CONFEDERATION NAVY

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Solomani		Male		—
TRAITS		—		SKILLS
STR	6	INT	6	Flyer (grav) 2
DEX	11	EDU	6	Gun Combat (slug) 3
END	8	SOC	5	Mechanic 1
				Navigation 1
				Survival 2
				Recon 1
				Vacc Suit 1
EQUIPMENT		Weapons 6mm Carbine (3D-1) or 10mm Autopistol (3D-3), Big Game Gun (3D+4/5D) or anything else he can get		

Note: DM -2 to use the Big Game Gun due to its Very Bulky trait



BACKGROUND

Daniel Ryder is assumed to be a petty officer in the Solomani Confederation Navy but for the purposes of this adventure could be a member of the *Deepnight Revelation* expedition instead. He is a former instructor on the navy's groundside operations and survival course, which for most personnel is an unpleasant couple of weeks in a simulated environment where they learn the rudiments of groundside navigation, making an emergency shelter and other skills most naval personnel never need. Those involved in exploration take a more advanced course and it was from this that Ryder was recruited.

Ryder is capable of undertaking routine tasks aboard a starship but it is planetside where he excels. His usual role is as scout, riding a grav platform or slipping

through the undergrowth of an alien planet. He is good but has a dark side that alienates many of his crewmates. Daniel likes to hunt and to eat what he hunts. This is not necessarily bad but his relish for the task can be unsettling. He particularly likes finding unusual ways to bring down game and will often try out a grossly overpowered weapon on some insignificant creature just to see what will happen. His favoured weapon is a specialist big game gun, a double-barrelled breech-loader from some backwater world. One barrel is rifled and fires a heavy bullet with good penetration whilst the other fires a very heavy shotgun cartridge. Ryder favours this weapon because 'you never know what will break cover next' but likes to try out anything else he can get his hands on.

Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Magazine	Magazine Cost	Traits
Big Game Gun (rifled barrel)	6	100	3D+4	10	Cr5000	1	Cr10	AP4, Very Bulky
Big Game Gun (shotgun barrel)		50	5D			1	Cr12	Very Bulky

COMMANDER REX WHELAN, CONFEDERATION NAVY

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Solomani		Male		—
TRAITS		—		SKILLS
STR	5	INT	8	Admin 1
DEX	9	EDU	10	Astrogation 2
END	4	SOC	10	Diplomat 1
				Gun Combat 0
				Leadership 2
				Melee 0
				Pilot (small craft) 2
				Tactics (naval) 2
				Vacc Suit 1
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: 8mm Revolver (3D-2), Dress Sword (2D)		



BACKGROUND

Rex Whelan started his career in small craft, notably fighters and strike boats, quickly rising to a leadership role within his squadron. After a distinguished career in small starships he was eventually given command of a patrol frigate, where he impressed his superiors sufficiently that he was selected for the exploration programme. He has fifteen years of experience as an exploration ship captain and was expected to retire with a promotion to captain at the end of this voyage. His performance, according to the ship's logs and testimony from the crew, was excellent for most of the expedition.

Whelan was burdened with an inexperienced and 'connected' first officer and ended up carrying a burden normally shared between the captain and executive officer. By the time his ship suffered its first serious misjump Whelan was in a state of nervous exhaustion. He made several poor decisions and was removed from command by his political officer to avoid endangering the crew. This was probably the correct decision but with a weak and unsuitable executive officer there was no alternative but for the political officer to assume temporary command. This led to a worsening situation aboard RSS *Frank Wild* and Whelan feels that his failure to keep it together and get the ship out of

trouble would have doomed the ship and crew under other circumstances. Whilst there is truth in this, he is unnecessarily harsh on himself and now has severe doubts about his ability to function as an officer.

Whelan will ask to join the Travellers' expedition to Terminus Point for a variety of reasons. He wants to see the mission through and wants to help in a way that does not require him to make command decisions. The obvious choice is to give him command of the detachment but whilst he will accept this he does not want it. He would prefer to simply be seconded to the crew of *Deepnight Revelation* as a pilot or bridge officer. This would actually be good for Whelan, allowing him to rebuild his confidence until he starts wanting to be in command once again. However, there is a problem. Whelan does not have a death wish but feels he has disgraced himself and is ruined. He may be prone to take more risks or advocate more dangerous manoeuvres than he might have a few months ago. Indeed, there may come a point where he chooses the most dramatic and dangerous option simply because he feels the need to prove he is once again the bold, decisive officer who led a squadron of strike boats into battle.

PIOTR GAVRAS, CONFEDERATION NAVY

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Solomani		Male		—
TRAITS		—		SKILLS
STR	11	INT	7	Electronics (remote ops) 1
DEX	7	EDU	7	Engineer (j-drive) 1
END	9	SOC	5	Gun Combat 0
				Mechanic 3
				Vacc Suit 2
EQUIPMENT		Weapons: 6mm Carbine (3D-1) or 10mm Autopistol (3D-3)		



BACKGROUND

Piotr Gavras is a member of the engineering team, on the 'brute force solutions' side of things. He is actually a skilled maintenance technician but tends to be assigned wherever there is a task requiring strength and a lack of subtlety. He is an absolute master of quick-and-dirty solutions to complex problems, although there is usually some collateral damage that has to be sorted out later. Gavras is unimaginative and unambitious, which may strike the Travellers as odd given his membership of the expedition. However, any great undertaking needs facilitators and Gavras is simply proud to be doing his duty as a small part of a big project.

Gavras will naturally volunteer for the detachment to be carried aboard *Deepnight Revelation*. He will do so for the honour of the Solomani Confederation and he means this sincerely. He knows he is good at what he does and despite not being inclined to seek promotion or even recognition he feels he should show these foreigners what a solid Solomani boy is capable of. In short, he thinks of himself as 'nothing special' but takes pride in the fact – he believes it is a fact, anyway – that the 'nothing special' produced by the Solomani Confederation is a cut above everyone else's average.

WILDLIFE ON FOUR

There are many species on Four that can be considered scenery rather than a threat to Travellers. Most can be scared off by a loud noise and are ineffectual even if they attack. However, there are a few more dangerous animals. Travellers might provoke these or be caught in their path as they flee a threat.

BIG STOMP

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Big Stomp	100	6m
SKILLS	Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Tail Lash 4D	
TRAITS	Armour (+4), Large (+5)	
BEHAVIOUR	Herbivore, Destructive Grazer	

Big Stomp is named for a child's toy popular on many Solomani worlds. It is a large quadruped thecodont with a long, oddly slender neck and a bifurcated tail. This is mainly used to thrash foliage, causing fruit and leaves to fall to the ground where they can be easily scooped up by a Big Stomp's lower jaw. The tail can deliver a strike sufficient to snap a thick branch and can serve as a lethal self-defence weapon at need. It is also dextrous enough to grab a tree trunk or other anchor point and support the creature almost as a fifth leg.

These creatures get their name for their habit of stomping bushes and other vegetation flat in order to consume everything that breaks off. This is an extremely destructive form of feeding but is not used for combat. Indeed, Big Stomps are rather flighty creatures – if that label can be applied to something the size of a 12-wheeled ATV. When threatened their usual response is to march determinedly away from the predator, lashing their tails behind them and slapping the ground as a deterrent.

Big Stomps typically wander in small family groups comprising a male, up to four females and about as many juveniles in various stages of development. They are not territorial but will often establish a temporary range within which other family groups are made unwelcome. A confrontation between two males, flanked by their 'wives', is a cacophonous affair. Physical aggression is rare but there is a lot of bellowing and stomping of huge feet to the accompaniment of tail slaps on the ground. Occasionally a female will switch sides and remain with the victorious family when her old mate is run off. Her offspring will usually – but not always – come with her.

APEX FOUR

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Apex Four	60	9m
SKILLS	Melee (natural) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (6D), Claws (4D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+6), Large (+3)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Hunter	

Less imaginatively named than Big Stomp, this creature is thought to be the top predator on Four. It is similar in many ways but smaller and faster. Its alligator-like body tapers into a much thicker neck and tail than a Big Stomp and it is much more powerfully built. Apex Fours operate solo, although a female might have three or four juveniles nearby. Its mode of attack depends on the size of the prey. A small creature – like a human – can be simply bitten or smashed by a tail slap. Larger prey are tackled in a particularly graphic manner; an Apex Four will charge from ambush at a surprisingly high speed, wedge-shaped head close to the ground. Its aim is to get under the prey and bowl it onto its side. At this point the Apex Four starts raking with its claws – front legs or back, or all at once on a suitably large target. Once disembowelled the prey is rapidly devoured. The Apex Four does not kill to eat – it guts its prey then kills it by eating.

The Apex Four is territorial and adept at concealing itself. It will use vegetation if available but its claws are often used to create a scrape into which it settles itself. An Apex Four can lie unmoving for several days, using little energy, waiting for something to come within reach. That something might be an ATV – these creatures will try to knock one over and eat it if they get the chance.



BIG STOMP

TRAVELLER

DEEPNIGHT REVELATION
VOIDSHORE

Voidshore

The final leg of the voyage takes *Deepnight Revelation* into the Voidshore, a region of space between the Great Rift and the edge of the Spiral Arm. Here, the Travellers learn the origins of the Biologicals and witness how they overrun entire worlds. *Deepnight Revelation* must engage in battle against a great biological starship to prevent the rapid spread of the Biologicals.

The Solomani Expedition

Deep in the Voidshore the Travellers encounter a three-ship expedition from the Solomani Confederation. They say they know nothing of the Deepnight Entity, and that they are in need of assistance. The Travellers' actions will decide if the Solomani are enemies or allies.

To Terminus Point

Finally, *Deepnight Revelation* stands on the very edge of the Great Rift. Her goal is almost within reach; only a hazardous crossing of the rift stands in the way. The experience gained during the long voyage – and perhaps the help of new friends – will carry the Travellers to their confrontation with the Deepnight Entity.

Voidshore. Mystery and adventure at the edge of the Spiral Arm.



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